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The legend continues!

WIN!
This fat PC!
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Does C&C work as an FPS?

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Serious Sam 2 ● Dark Age of Camelot
Commanche 4 ● Deadly Dozen
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next

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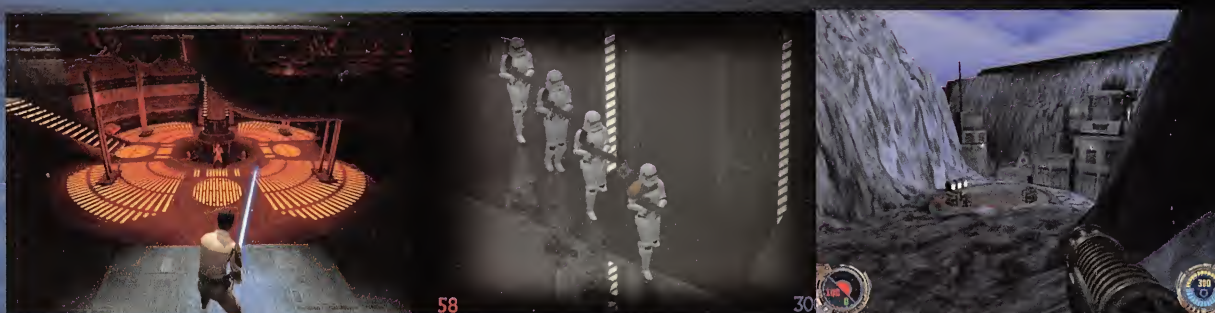# NO CDS?
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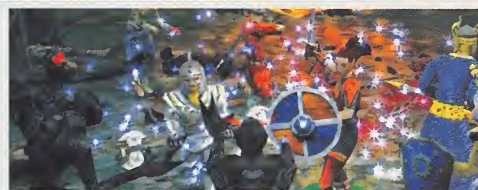
ACTIVISION.

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All the latest cool stuff: demos, mods and patches!

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DVD PAGES

And so begins the regular monthly DVD offerings. Massive

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What Have You Done?!

Welcome to the future of gaming. The new year is a distant drunken memory, we've seen which PC games are on the horizon for the next twelve months (and what about that rumour that DNF isn't on Take2's budget for this financial year? Another slip? Christmas 2002? Whatever!) and we've begun the long hard grind down the road of another 200+ reviews in 13 issues.

But something has changed in gaming. Before 2002 there were two very different kinds of gamer; PC gamers and console gamers, and never the twain did meet. PC gaming is a serious, full-time business involving hours of dedication and thousands of dollars of hardware. PlayStation was something you played with your drunk mates on Saturday afternoon while you waited for the footy.

Not anymore. XBOX is here and even we at PowerPlay have to admit it's a different kind of console. For a start, many developers working for the new platform have PC experience - Oddworld Inhabitants, Bungie and Lionhead are just three - and they're bringing PC-style games to XBOX. HALO, for instance, is a very solid FPS in true PC style.

Not only are PC developers looking at XBOX, the very nature of the system means porting to PC will be all but inevitable for most titles. The XBOX is a PC - it uses 8086 architecture, it has a motherboard, RAM, a video subsystem, all the anatomy we know so well, just packed into a new kind of box. What's more, because the XBOX is a standardised chunk of hardware, it can squeeze far better performance out of its at first glance meagre spec than the equivalently clocked PC. And it runs DirectX, an API originally designed for PC. The upshot of all this is that games that once may have come out on PC first will be coming out on XBOX first. And who wants to read nothing but reviews of console ports?

We've had an XBOX in the office for the past two months. We like the games, in fact we like them a lot. And to this end, next month the PowerPlay you've known so well for the last five years will look a little different. There'll be a new section of previews, reviews and hardware. An XBOX section. Same PowerPlay style, same PowerPlay attention to detail and gaming experience, just a different platform.

There are still two kinds of gamer; hardcore enthusiasts and casual tourists. Until now, the hardcore have only ever had one true platform. But now PowerPlay believes they have two.

Welcome XBOX. Welcome to PowerPlay.

Anthony Fordham
Editor
anthonyf@next.com.au

Dusty machines are all that remain

Warehouses are all that is left in the distant future

Static

America torn to shreds in the distant future
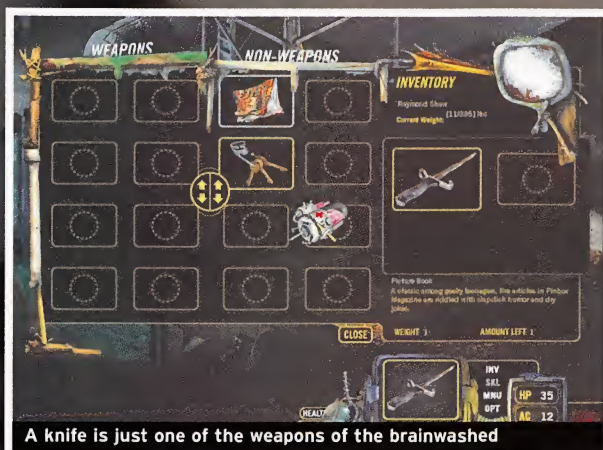
A knife is just one of the weapons of the brainwashed
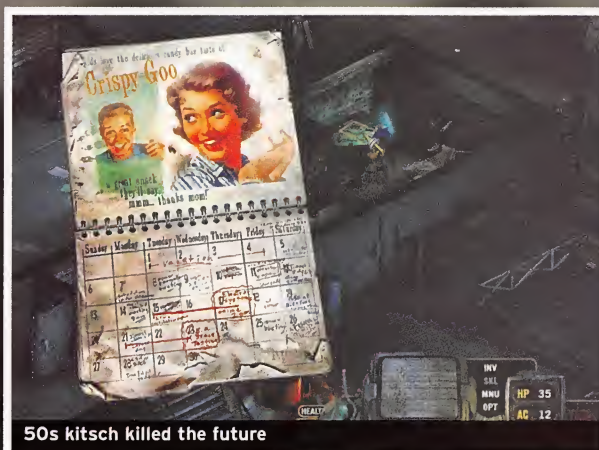
50s kitsch killed the future

Practically every fan of 2D isometric PC RPGs will agree that Fallout 2 is still the best of its kind ever made. Arcanum had promise but not the same atmosphere, humour or replayability – and let's not mention the numerous bugs. So in the finest modern DIY tradition it takes the common people to change the world. A bunch of gamers from various parts of the USA banded together over several forums and decided to make a sequel of their own. You play as one of the few survivors of a nuclear holocaust that has wiped out most of what we know as civilisation. You are not alone in the battle-scarred scene. The other survivors hunkered down in one of the few remaining military bunkers now face a new threat more malicious and frightening than even the Holocaust itself. Their minds are no longer their own. The game promises an epic RPG struggle against the institutional, brainwashing overlords known as the "tronic" in pursuit of freedom in a ravaged American landscape. You escape the bunker you awoke in and must find a way to survive in a dangerous and barren world.

Static is still in the early stages of development but the screenshots convey some of the post apocalyptic atmosphere of the game nicely.

Promised is a dust-swept journey across the scorched nation explaining the disasters, showing the destruction and maybe finally delivering redemption. Complete with the Fallout standard quest-based journeying, Static will present compelling conversation and character based adventures that form the canvas of this mottled, darkened wasteland. For the combat-hungry, tactical battles are also the avenues for conflict resolution, with the range of weaponry still to be confirmed.

Static has also made it into the final round of this year's Independant Game Festival (www.igf.com) which includes the excellent Ace of Angels. The winner is to be decided in late March and will receive a $20 000 cash prize along with receiving the attention of publishers arcross the US and around the world. Currently the development team working on Static consists of ten members, and they may still be in need of help should you be capable, talented and interested in the apocalypse. At this stage, the game's structure is still fluid and the story in the process of being created, but it certainly looks like a game to keep an eye on.

George Soropos

Developer:	Static Dev Team
Publisher:	TBA
Due:	TBA
URL:	www.static-thegame.com

Why Static Deserves a Second Look:

| It's not Fallout 3 but it could be | 2D isometric RPG adventuring | Fresh young development team at the helm | You could be involved! |

Nacho Man vaporizes Cuttermouth with a well-

13 : 2

This boat was built for shooting

Big and slow but packing a punch

Cratered
Galactic Battles on the High Seas

placed shot. $ 142900 0

3:42

We are strong in numbers

Ack! Put me back in the water!

Objective 2

The realm of action shooter titles for the modestly set up PC games machine is lean to say the least. Usually the consumer is forced to load up an old game that matches their specs. In the real world, 56K modems and CPUs that fall short of the 1Ghz mark, are far more common than The Beast and the Joe Normals who own these rigs like to play flashy, new games as much as anyone.

Furious Entertainment saw a hole in the market and are going to jam fill it with Cratered, a third person 3D action shooter whose primary purpose is fast, furious multiplay over LAN and internet for systems ranging from the most basic to the most extreme. The price of Cratered is promised to be considerably lower than the green note required of many current titles.

Set on the crumbling distant planet of Carpax, two civilisations battle for control of the planet surface. The Carpacians are a war-loving race defending their home planet from the crashed invaders, the Might of Columbiad, a war-loving race intent on smashing their new neighbours. So the logical result is a mad-capped team-based battle on the high seas that bears little

relevance to the intergalactic battle preamble.

Cratered takes place on the water surface of the planet in various heavily armed and armoured boats. The big waves of the open seas as well as various reefs and structures form the battlefield. The game casts players on either side of the conflict in team based battle that focuses on capture the flag style power struggles and of course, the annihilation of the enemy.

The networking interface in Cratered is designed to use as little bandwidth as possible, so even with 14.4K modems the game is promised to run smoothly. 56K modems will be able to host up to 8-player games, while 2-32 low-bandwidth players can be hosted by higher connections such as cable and suffer no performance issues due to their lower-quality connections.

Although without a publisher at this stage, Cratered cuts right to the chase for an action gaming experience. Immediate, fast-paced, class-based, it should see the light of day one way or another - even if that means players ordering it over the internet! With an engine that means anyone and everyone can get in and have a bash, we reckon Cratered is headed for big things.

John Dewhurst

Developer:	Furious Entertainment
Publisher:	TBA
Distributor:	TBA
Available:	late 2002

Why Cratered Deserves a Second Look:

| Fast-paced, multiplayer action | Sumptuous environs and water effects | Class-based seasick warfare | Should be the right price (i.e. sub $60) |

Spotlight

news from all quarters of the globe

DON'T SELL CAMELOT

A group of online gamers has taken developer Mythic Entertainment to court over moves by Mythic to ban the sale of Dark Age of Camelot items on the internet. The trial is yet to commence. One freedom fighter said, "Does a MMORPG player have rights to his time, or does Mythic own that player's time?"

SOLO ARX

In their monthly update, Fishtank Interactive announced that upcoming RPG, Arx Fatalis, will not feature multiplayer. Attention has been centred on the single player game that promises upwards of 80 hours of gameplay. A multiplayer Arx Fatalis may be released separately.

GOING POSTAL 2

Running With Scissors is set to sequel their highly criticised 1997 action title POSTAL. POSTAL 2 will use the Unreal Warfare engine and promises all the blood curdling, context-free mayhem of the original, plus multiplayer support and customisation tools.

Hercules dumps nVidia

New strategic alliance for ATI

In a move that has stunned many in the tech world, Hercules, manufacturer of the popular 3D Prophet 3 line of video cards, has turned its back on nVidia as the chipset of choice. Instead Hercules will base all of their future graphics cards around the ATI Radeon GPU.

"ATI provides the most advanced technology for both 3D gaming and digital PCTV applications. This

video editing and DVD playback and proves extremely user-friendly."

The new cards lwill try to set the standard for multimedia graphics cards and commenced shipping in February 2002. Not only will the new cards provide high end 3D gaming performance but those based around the ATI ALL-IN-WONDER chipset will have an impressive list of features. These cards enable users to record video onto PC for editing or playback,

8500. The latter two cards, aimed at the gaming and family markets, will be priced $549 and $999 respectively.

Currently ATI based cards make up around 14% of the 3D graphics card market. The new partnership should see this market share increase significantly.

"Our agreement with Hercules is proof that ATI is accepted as a leading provider of graphics acceleration technology for the gaming community," said Dave Orton, President and CEO of ATI. "The combination of our proven technologies and Hercules expertise will provide customers with the most advanced solutions in multimedia and entertainment. This is a very important step for ATI and its continuing success in the retail market."

> **"... proof that ATI is accepted as a leading provider of technology for the gaming community... " CEO of ATI**

partnership is a strategic shift for Hercules to meet the expectations of both the digital generation and the most demanding gamers," said Claude Guillemot, President of Hercules Technologies. "ATI's ALL-IN-WONDER RADEON' is the leading product to combine PC and the TV,

easily edit video, operate as a digital TV tuner and provide high quality DVD playback. The three new cards announced so far are the 3D Prophet FDX8500 LE utilising the Radeon 8500 GPU, a fast 3D card with the high end gaming market in mind, as well as the 3D Prophet ALL-IN-WONDER 7500 and

Epic Tampers with Unreal 2
Hand-drawn shadows don't fool the gamers

A single screenshot of the highly anticipated Unreal 2 was enough to make trouble of publicity for the upcoming Epic Games release. Published in a big name overseas magazine, rumblings began online amongst fans over the authenticity of one of the shots. Matthias Worch, senior level editor at developer Legend Entertainment, denied the claims stating the shots were "100% real".

Unbeknownst to the Legend team, publisher Epic Games had authorised some changes. Mark Rein, Vice President of Epic Games Inc. issued this clarification:

"It had been modified by hand-drawing shadows into the screenshot after it had been taken. Player shadows weren't working at the time so I gave the go-ahead to add them and release the modified image... This is something I am 100% responsible for and in retrospect I should not have done it - I would like to take this opportunity to apologise to our fans and gamers in general for doing this. This is not something you would expect from Epic Games and I want people to know that I was responsible for it."

The offensive screenshot

Indiana Jones returns
Collective to produce next in LucasArts series

L ucasArts Entertainment has engaged big name developer The Collective to produce the next title in the long running game series starring Indiana Jones, one of the most recognisable action heroes in film. The as yet untitled game, to be released in late 2002, promises to continue "in the epic tradition of LucasArts' rich Indiana Jones action-adventure legacy."

This is another example of Lucasarts incorporating the work of developers with a proven track record in a particular area of gaming. In the past, Lucasarts has enlisted Raven Software and Ensemble. Presumably LucasArts will develop the product in conjunction with The Collective, maintaining strong artistic and content control over it as they did with Raven for Jedi Outcast.

"The Collective bring considerable technological and development expertise that, in this case, will greatly benefit one of our most important brands, Indiana Jones," says LucasArts' President, Simon Jeffery. "The Collective's efforts on the highly anticipated game Buffy the Vampire Slayer were a key component in determining this relationship."

Indy on your infernal Machine again

Unofficial X-Box controllers
Thrustmaster provides alternatives

A s the X-Box approaches launch date in Australia, the question on everyone's lips is "what about that gamepad?" The X-Box controller is bigger than any previous console gamepad and there is concern among some gamers that the controller may not be ideal for all hands.

Microsoft is shipping only one controller with each X-Box so the market for peripherals is wide open. Thrustmaster will release three gamepads for the upcoming Microsoft system. The ergonomic Firestorm U-pad is markedly different from the X-Box controller and is an officially endorsed third party peripheral. The more conventional Firestorm Programmable (top right) and Ferrari Licensed 360 Modena Programmable Gamepad (bottom right) are X-Box supported but are not official X-Box products.

Microsoft is understandably keen to support its own product but X-Box customers should consider all their options as these peripherals are significant investments. The Firestorm programmable and the Firestorm Upad gamepads will retail for $59.95 each. The Ferrari Licensed 360 Modena Programmable Gamepad will retail for $69.95.

The power is in your hands

BYTESIZE

BUFFY BITES DUST

The third person action game based on the popular TV series, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, in development at The Collective has been cancelled for PC. The project has not been scrapped entirely and is set to appear on other platforms.

DX2 PLAYS ALONE

Warren Spector recently confirmed that Deus Ex 2 will be a singleplayer only affair. While multiplayer was well received for the original, the ongoing support required would draw attention away from the focus of the project.

ETHERLORDS PATCH

Fishtank has released Patch 1.04 for Etherlords. The update corrects the imbalance in some battles and provides a log file for combat. Note to irate players across the country - you aren't lame!

DREAMCATCHER

Publisher DreamCatcher Interactive, responsible for titles such as In Cold Blood and Frank Herbert's Dune, has launched a new division dedicated to adventure titles called The Adventure Company. Its first game will be The Cameron Files - Secret at Loch Ness.

Diablo II crippled
Realms flooded with duped items

EA SECRET PATCH

Those trying to download patch v1.01 for Sid Meier's SimGolf from the EA website might be discouraged to find that they must register their purchase first. Mandatory registering might make sense for marketing and in discouraging piracy but is it legal to force a customer to give their contact details in order to access support?

B & W GONGS

Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences' has announced the finalists for the Fifth Annual Interactive Achievement Awards. Lionhead's Black & White received seven nominations including for Game of the Year. Other nominated titles included Civilization III and Dark Age of Camelot.

HOOD SPELLBOUND

Spellbound Studios has announced Robin Hood, a new strategy combat game in the style of their previous title, Desperados: Wanted Dead or Alive. Robin Hood promises the entire cast of Robin Hood and friends, engaged in 40 non-linear, varied missions in a highly realistic medieval setting. The game is due late 2002.

H & D AGAIN

Hidden & Dangerous Deluxe, an enhanced version of the original H&D has been announced by Lonely Cat Games, comprised of former members of Illusion Softworks. The game should boast an improved Insanity3D engine, enhanced visuals and will include the Fight For Freedom expansion.

In recent months, Battle.net has been hampered by widespread item duplication in the ever-popular Diablo II. Originating from the US East Realm and quickly spreading to the Europe Realm, the practise made possible the duplication of valuable items in the game which were subsequently sold to other players for profit. Initially Blizzard denied the problem even existed, stating that the process described was impossible given the architecture of Battle.net. Acknowledgment of the problem came in the form of a notice of the loophole's correction. This hack no longer works in Diablo II.

The process required frequent exiting and re-entering of the game and so put an inordinate strain on the servers, the result being significant latency problems across the Realms, affecting large numbers of players not involved in the duping. Further, the trade of such phantom items caused the collapse of the item trade economy and more seriously, widespread instability in the game due to the massive number of duplicated items stored and equipped on characters.

Online games are as vulnerable as any software to hacking and problems like these are almost unavoidable in games like Diablo II with such a large player community. As much as this is an ever-present concern, Battle.net has experienced a number of Diablo II problems in recent months, from character hacks to level advancing cheats and hacks resulting in server crashes. A stable environment is central to maintaining player interest in online worlds and so this has been a constant headache for Blizzard and Battle.net.

Along with a notice informing players of the remedied situation, the Battle.net team responded with a stern warning to Diablo players: "Any individual caught using a hack on Battle.net (including, but not limited to "dupe" hacks and "server crash" hacks) may have their items, characters or accounts deleted... The Battle.net team is devoted to nullifying all hacks and exploits on Diablo II realms as well as catching individuals exploiting our games."

The ever popular Diablo II

Battle.net hunting down a miscreant

This is Serious, Sam Comp
Take 2 Interactive gives for the greater good

Shooters, shooters, everywhere! Serious Sam: The Second Encounter is the follow up to CroTeam's explosive hit from last year and to commemorate this joyous event, prizes must be distributed far and wide.

Thanks to Leanne at Take 2 Interactive, we have 5 Serious Sam: The Second Encounter packs to give away. Each includes the game, a truly bodacious t-shirt, a hole-in-the-wall size poster and a Take 2 bag to transport all manner of goods.

All you need to do is tell us who your favourite Sam is and why. In 30 words or less, tell us why Sam Neill is the finest actor since Lawrence Olivier,

or why Sam I Am is the best Dr Suess creation or why Sam Newman is not at all like a pillock. The choice is yours. The most creative entries will be busting The Second Encounter prize packs open all over the lounge room floor.

Send your entries to:

**This is Serious, Sam
PC Powerplay
78 Renwick St
Redfern NSW 2016**

"My nipples are like pencils!"

Sam is Dying to get to your House

Morrowind in the Air

A return to the future of RPGs

Stunningly eery environments
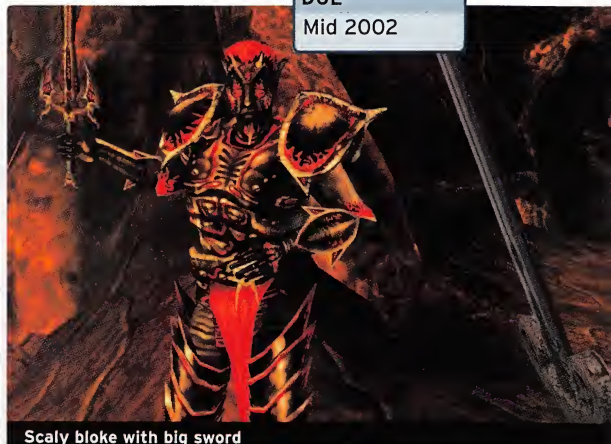
Scaly bloke with big sword

The Shadowy Knoll of Death

He wants you to tickle his ribs

BYTESIZE

SHE'S BACK

TV's original crime fighting heroine Linda Carter, famed for her role in the 70s as Wonder Woman, will lend her voice to Morrowind. No doubt her husband, Chairman of ZeniMax Media, parent company of Bethesda Softworks, helped in landing the job.

GALLEON SINKING

A highlight of last year's E3 was the action adventure frolic, Galleon. The game has been notably absent from publicity and has in fact slipped to mid year. It's release will coincide with the release of yet another next gen console. Hang in there, Tomb Raider fans!

RTCW EDITOR

Id Software has made an SDK available for Return to Castle Wolfenstein that allows the creation of single and multiplayer maps. Not strictly a Software Development Kit, it's rather a level editting kit. For easy reference, single player level Escape and multiplayer level Beach are both included.

DEPARTS EVERQUEST

Brad Quaid and Jeff Butler, both creators of the phenomenally successful Everquest and formerly of Somy Online, have formed Sigil Games Online. This new company will concentrate on producing new - you guessed it - massively multiplayer online RPGs.

When we previewed Morrowind in our September 2001 issue, we opined that there'd be a mere 'few months' to wait before we'd be able to get our hankering hands on a boxed copy of Bethesda Softwork's latest RPG masterwork. Yet here we are - more than a few months later - doing another preview. We can't help but wonder why this is the case. Okay, it's fair enough that Bethesda are taking great pains to ensure that this latest iteration of the Elder Scrolls saga won't suffer from the multitude of bugs that plagued its criminally underrated predecessor, but still – what exactly have they been doing since we last talked to them?

Busy Building a Universe

Well, quite a lot, actually. Firstly and most importantly, Bethesda have distilled their Elder Scrolls Construction Kit to pure plug-in perfection. The kit, which will be included with the retail code, allows players to edit the nature of their game by developing 'plug-ins' for it -

self made modifications that can alter almost every aspect of the Morrowind universe. As an example of just how much Bethesda have refined this powerful construction tool, consider that, now, a literally endless array of items and characters can be created with it. Consider that these items and characters can be used in quests of your own devising. Consider that players can not only record their own speech, but also lip sync it to the facial movements of the 3D model for which it is intended. That isn't just a fastidious attention to detail - that is complete insanity.

This insane attention to detail is seen in more than just Morrowind's powerful editing tools. The game's dialogue system, which has been developed over the past couple of months into a state of near perfection, is also a piece of frighteningly meticulous game design. In our earlier preview we elaborated on how NPC reactions to your character can be affected by something as major as your reputation or minor as your conversational manner. Well,

Bethesda weren't content to leave it at that, and now NPC interaction has developed to the point where dialogue can branch from three to thirty conversational options that all depend exclusively on the way you conduct yourself in the game. It's no exaggeration to say that the chains of causation have spread far and wide in the lands of Tamriel.

So Who will Publish?

As mentioned initially, bug fixing and playtesting has been the order of the day since our last chat with Bethesda and, frankly, we're not surprised. We all remember how massively complex Daggerfall was and, yes, we all remember how massively buggy it was as a result. That's not going to be the case this time. Bethesda would rather release a late game than one that doesn't live up to the fullness of it's potential - and that's a practice we're inclined to agree with. Ubi Soft has signed on to publish and distribute Morrowind in Europe but there is no local publisher at present. Stay tuned for updates.

Intel's backup plan

Yamhill technology to bridge the gap

GEFORCE 100 MIL

With the official launch of the Geforce4 graphics chipset imminent, Nvidia has achieved an important milestone: the shipping of its 100 millionth chip. Thanks to world beating products from the RIVA and TNT families to today's Geforce and nForce chipsets, Nvidia has become a true industry giant.

TELSTRA PRICES

Telstra has changed its broadband pricing schemes recently. Although some welcoming alterations were made such as the reduction in price of the heavy-user 5Gb and 10Gb plans, the more popular 3Gb plans have had price increases of up to 21%. Changes took effect for existing users on 1st March.

COOL NORTHWOOD

The new Pentium 4 'Northwood' chips with a 0.13-micron process seem to be as cool as Intel had promised. 1.6AGHz versions of the chip seem to be able to obtain speeds of 2.2GHz with minimal voltage tweaking and stock cooling! Brings back memories of the Celeron 300A...

NVIDIA'S PITCH

Nvidia's sales pitch for the GeForce 4 will concentrate on mainstream commercial systems, at the expensive of the usual industry practice of launching to high end users. This is Nvidia's attempt to strike at the heart of ATI's OEM territory.

Former Intel CEO Andy Cole once wrote an autobiography titled 'Only the paranoid survive'. The title underlines the chipmaker's unrelenting business practices that have made it the dominant industry player it is today. The paranoia at Intel is still very much present and this time it's centred around the first tentative steps of the market into the realm of 64-bit processing.

Mid last year Intel announced its 64-bit Itanium processor, a chip that took 7 years and an estimated one billion US dollars to develop. With the need for complete software rewrites to run anywhere near the speeds promised, customers are anything but frantic to snap up the new technology. Throw into the equation AMD's plans to release its Hammer series of x86-64 processors and Intel has every right to feel uneasy.

Secretly, Intel engineers have been developing a backup plan to the IA-64 architecture should the market prove unresponsive. The development in question, dubbed 'Yamhill Technology', aims to provide Pentium 4 processors with x86-64 support when activated. This will transform the Pentium 4 into 32/64-bit hybrid chip and will allow it to compete in the same market as AMD's Hammer.

Although currently still in development, Intel hopes that Yamhill Technology will never be required to see the light of day. It merely serves as a backup plan if the IA-64 architecture turns out to be a complete flop. The technology is not expected to be ready until late 2003 or early 2004. By that time Intel will be required to assess AMD's threat to the Itanium and decide whether or not to unleash Yamhill.

Second generation itanium processor aka McKinley - already doomed?

3dfx Treasures for Sale

Rare Voodoo5 under the hammer

Ebay hold sales for all sorts of weird and wonderful things. From cars and computers to seasoned Everquest characters and now even unsupported, engineering sample videocards that never made it out onto the retail market!

A very rare Voodoo5 6000 video adapter attracted over 100,00 hits and 52 bids in the 5 days it was up for auction, finally going for the record price of US$2,150. With four independent VSA-100 graphics chips working in tandem, 128Mb of onboard memory, single pass full-scene sub-pixel anti-aliasing and T-buffer technology, its image quality leaves even today's Geforce3 and Radeon 8500 spluttering in the dust.

Supposedly only 50 samples of the card were ever produced with only one-third of those in working order - most of which are in the hands of former 3dfx employees. At the time of writing, another V5 6000 is up for grabs on Ebay. So if you're Voodoo crazy, you know where to head...
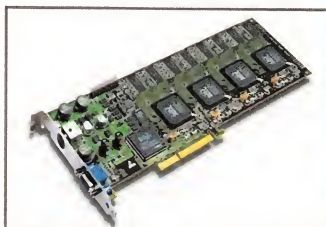
Super rare Voodoo 5

FEATURES

- 2 SINGLE PLAYER CAMPAIGNS, EACH WITH 12 MISSIONS

- 3 DIFFICULTY LEVELS GUARANTEEING FUN FOR BOTH BEGINNERS AND ADVANCED PLAYERS

- MULTIPLAYER MODE FOR UP TO 8 PLAYERS VIA A NETWORK/INTERNET ON 14 DIFFERENT MAPS

- 2 DIFFERENT MULTIPLAYER MODES: 'LAST MAN STANDING' AND 'CAPTURE THE FLAG'

- 11 CHARACTER CLASSES PER SIDE WITH SPECIAL SKILLS PLUS VARIOUS VEHICLES

- EXPERIENCE SYSTEM FOR YOUR UNITS

- VARIOUS BUILDING OPTIONS (SANDBAGS, BARBED WIRE, ARMY BUILDINGS) AS WELL AS NUMEROUS UPGRADES

- RESOLUTIONS: 800X600, 1024X768 AND 1280X1024 IN TRUE COLOR PLUS ZOOM LEVELS

- TERRAIN WITH REAL PROFILE AND TERRAIN FORMATIONS

- DAY AND NIGHT CYCLE WITH DYNAMIC LIGHT AND WEATHER CONDITIONS

- REALISTIC DISPLAY OF GRAPHIC EFFECTS SUCH AS EXPLOSIONS, SMOKE, FIRE, ETC.

- PHYSICS ENGINE FOR NATURAL MOVEMENTS (AVALANCHES, GRENADE FRAGMENTS, ETC.)

Australia's Most Wanted
Your Top Ten Chart relaunched!

Dungeon Siege

The venerable institution of AMW has been in the pages of PCPP for a good two years now and we felt it was time to pick the old girl up, dust her off a little and reintroduce her to a games hungry public. Australia's Most Wanted gives you the chance to voice your opinions on your most eagerly anticipated PC titles and it allows us a chance to give the latest and greatest titles away every month.

You read correctly: Titles. Each month, we'll give away three packs of two of the newest gold award winning titles as reviewed in PCPP. Six games that have received the auspicious Powerplay seal of approval will be dispersed amongst the Powerplay faithful every singe month. That's over $150 worth of games for the cost of a postage stamp or an e-mail.

All you have to do is put your top five most anticipated games on the back of an envelope and send it to:

Australia's Most Wanted
78 Renwick St
Redfern NSW 2016

If you'd rather send us an e-mail, you need to include your full name and address and, of course, your top 5 upcoming games.

In commemoration of our new and improved AMW, these entrants will receive the following games:

Julianne Brown NSW
Medal of Honor: Allied Assault
Wizardry 8
Dennis Brooks Vic
Ghost Recon
Battle Realms
Anthony Waits
Il-2 Sturmovik
Microsoft Flight Sim 2002

AUSTRALIA'S MOST WANTED

1	CS: Condition Zero
2	Warcraft III:Reign of Chaos
3	Dungeon Siege
4	IceWind Dale II
5	Neverwinter Nights
6	IGI 2: Covert Strike
7	Freedom Force
8	Doom III
9	Imperium Galactica III
10	Unreal Tournament II

Send your entries to
AMW@pcpowerplay.com.au

IGI 2 :Covert Strike

Imperium Galactica III

Neverwinter Nights

dr claw

hello my champions of all that is 133+ and welcome once again to my little patch of the universe which is where i live. you will all be very happy to know that i am out of the hospital and back at home where i am resting more or less comfortably. i say more or less because of the steel ring that is surgically implanted in the back of my head and chained to my bedpost. it is for my own good says my three maiden aunts who now look after me and promised to get me a new pet soon. the best thing about their boarding house is the lan where me and stinky mr chips and the oozing guy from the third floor play counterstrike against a family of detainees who seem very angry about something or other and always win. they are pretty 133+ i must admit. the lan is good because it also connects to the internet so i can visit www.pcpowerplay.com.au and keep posting my interesting thoughts on the forums and also submit this column to the magazine. anyway i am now living in a boarding house with my three maiden aunts because my dad says he just can't take it anymore. what with the russians who ripped off his credit card and now the hospital bills and having to

pay for the nrma careflight helicopter that crashed when i stuck my gum into some crucial component. dad also apparently had to pay the medical bills for all the people who were in the helicopter with me. and he also had to pay for the steel ring that has been implanted in the back of my head but he said that one was okay and he wasn't complaining. so now i spend most of the day in bed on the internet or on the lan and it is a pretty good life except the only thing that is missing is a pet so what pet should i get? everyone should write to my special pcpowerplay email address and tell me what pet to get and whoever has the best idea will be 133+ and will win some kind of prize which is probably whichever game the pcpp guys don't want anymore. l8r!

drclaw@pcpowerplay.com.au

COMING SOON

March

Army Men RTS (Take 2 Interactive)
4 Wheel Thunder (Take 2 Interactive)
Casino (Take 2 Interactive)
Conseal (Read Ant)
Global Operations (Electronic Arts)
Heroes of Might & Magic IV (Take 2 Interactive)
Legend Double Pack 1&2 (Take 2 Interactive)
Legends of Might & Magic IX (Take 2 Interactive)
M4 Armoured Crash (GameNation)
Reality DeathMatch (Red Ant)
Serious Sam: Gold Pack (Take 2 Interactive)
Starmageddon (Red Ant)
Star Trek Bridge Commander (Activision)
Star Wars Jedi Knight 2: Jedi Outcast (Activision)
The Sims: Vacation (Electronic Arts)
Tiger USA Tour 2002 (Electronic Arts)
War Commander (Red Ant)
Warrior Kings (Red Ant)

April

Age of Wonders 2 (Take 2 Interactive)
Airlines 2 (Take 2 Interactive)
Cold Zero: The Last Stand (Red Ant)
Far West (Red Ant)
FIFA 2002 World Cup (Electronic Arts)
GTA 3 (Take 2 Interactive)
Hotel Tycoon 2 (Red Ant)
Iron Storm (Take 2 Interactive)
Master of Orion 3 (GameNation)
Natural Resistance (Red Ant)

May

F1 2002 (Electronic Arts)
Freedom Force (Electronic Arts)
Geoff Crammond's Grand Prix ver. 4 (GameNation)
Unreal 2 (GameNation)
Mafia: City of Lost Heaven (Take 2 Interactive)

inform — The Official Australian Games Chart
Compiled by Inform in association with AVSDA

W/E 3 Febuary 2002

TOP 20 — Best Selling Full Price PC Games (over $30)

#		Title	Genre
1	✪	Medal Of Honor Allied Asslt	Action
2	◆	Harry Potter	Adventure
3	▼	The Sims Hot Date	Strategy
4	▼	The Sims	Strategy
5	✪	Sid Meier's Sim Golf	Sports
6	▼	Empire Earth	Strategy
7	▼	Retrn To Cstl Wolfenstein	Action
8	▲	Civilization 3	Strategy
9	▼	The Sims Collectors Edition	Strategy
10	▼	Diablo II: Lord Of Destrctn	RPG
11	▼	The Sims House Party	Strategy
12	✪	Black & White Creature Isl	Strategy
13	▼	The Sims Livin' Large	Strategy
14	▼	Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon	Strategy
15	▼	Diablo II	RPG
16	✪	Comanche 4	Simulator
17	▼	Sim City 3000 Unlimited	Strategy
18	▼	Star Wars Galactic Bttlegrnd	Strategy
19	▼	Half Life Ptm Edition	Action
20	▼	C & C Yuris Revenge Exp	Strategy

✪ New Entry ◆ Non Mover ▲ Up from last week ▼ Down from last week

Charts can be viewed at **www.informbd.com.au** as part of

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Thrustmaster of Choice

The nation has spoken and the words they uttered were: "we love analog". Not by a significant margin but the choice is clear – analog beats digital hands down. Peter Colla wins the Top Gun 2 Pro Shock Joystick and all of our winners received their choice of a Firestorm Dual Analog 2 or Digital 2 Gamepad. Big ups to Katy at Thrustmaster!

Peter Colla Vic
Daniel Archer Tas
Michael McMahon Vic
Marie Silver NSW
John Henderson NSW

DvDanalysis

A.I.

Warner Bros, M 15+

Kubrick snuffed it before he could oversee the completion of this project, an idea he'd been developing since the early 80s. Considering it was Spielberg who finished the job, AI could have been a disaster. Osmet, who's due to hold up a convenience store any year now, is okay, but the real star is Jude Law as a robotic male prostitute. One thing overlooked in this film is that the only way the robots could go indefinitely without recharging is to be nuclear powered. Even the teddy bear. Can you imagine a world where loving parents give their kids radioactive toys? What if they break them, for Christ's sake?!

3/5

PERFECT BLUE

Madman, MA 15+

Mima Kirigoe is in a Japanese pop idol band, one of those outfits that puts little girls in maid uniforms and gets them to sing and dance to music as disposable as they are. When Mima decides to jump into an acting career, one she can survive in past her late teens, it seems like a good idea. Until her obsessive fans start spamming her with hate mail, she's forced to play the victim in a rape scene, and her grip on reality starts to collapse. When her colleagues start getting murdered, things really go off the deep end. This is the definitive anime psycho-thriller, flawlessly directed, and presented on a feature-laden disc. Alarming, gripping, and disturbing, Perfect Blue is one of the best movies to come out in years.

5/5
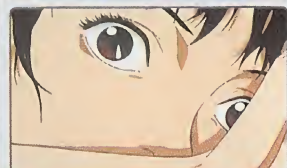
BLACK JACK

Madman, M 15+

From the creator of Astro Boy comes a rare entry into the anime field: a medical mystery thriller. Black Jack is the best surgeon in the world. A man of mystery, he works in the shadows for the highest bidder, performing expert surgery on heart and brain alike. When a strange new disease starts crippling the world's best and brightest, Black Jack is coerced into finding a solution. Decently animated, moderately paced, this movie is most notable for its transitions between extremes of ultra cute little kiddies and the most explosive of medical disasters. It's pretty silly, but definitely not for small children.

2/5

THE BLUE PLANET

Roadshow, E

The vast expanses of our oceans are still a complete mystery to us. Every time we think we've got the oceans figured out, some bizarre new species shows up that forces us to rethink everything. Like those weird squids they found last year. This enormous, hostile environment is made sane and majestic when its most photogenic aspects are captured on film, and when David Attenborough narrates. This deluxe slipcase set contains almost nine hours of footage, including the complete series and substantial bonus footage. A splendid audio visual primer on the wonders of the ocean deep.

3/5

CARDCAPTORS VOL 4

Madman, PG

Sakura's surreal, and strangely addictive adventures continue. As the destined Cardcaptor of the Clow cards, it's her duty to round up these bizarre supernatural collectibles before they destroy her hometown with the power of cuteness. Her best friend and archivist, Madison, also designs her fantasmagorical costumes. This show is classic Studio Clamp (Utena, Rayearth et al), yet with more universal appeal than most of their other shows. Not only do you get some of the best oddball humour money can buy, it's also an amazing insight into dominant Japanese social mores. Also, it's easier to follow than, say, Digimon.

3/5

FELAFEL

Roadshow, MA 15+

Yet another incredibly slow moving Aussie drama, in the tradition of Lantana and Mullet. You wouldn't guess it from the source material, though. The book was a landmark of Australian popular fiction, at once a condemnation and a celebration of the share house lifestyle. Milk crates, bucket bongs and psychotic personalities clashing in vulgar displays of animal savagery. This could have been the equivalent of Bottom: The Movie, but instead is more of the same. Arty, meaningful, and missing the point completely. Aside from brief glimpses of cane toad golf and Sophie Lee, Felafel is a let down.

2/5

ROLLERBALL: SPECIAL EDITION

20th Century Fox, PG

One of a slew of nightmare-future sci-fi flicks to come out in the 70s, Rollerball holds up better than most. The blistering speed of the Rollerball games makes for stark contrast with the rest of the visuals, which depict a decadent future world of flared jumpsuits and recreational drug use. While the computer science of Rollerball hasn't proved prophetic (a punch-card supercomputer?), the vision of a world controlled by a handful of ruthless corporations cuts close to the bone. Add some Toccata & Fugue, a spot of Adagio, and lashings of ultra-violence, and you've got an understated Euro-classic that gets better on each viewing. Now with two commentary tracks, and an entertainingly frank documentary. It's better than the remake.

5/5
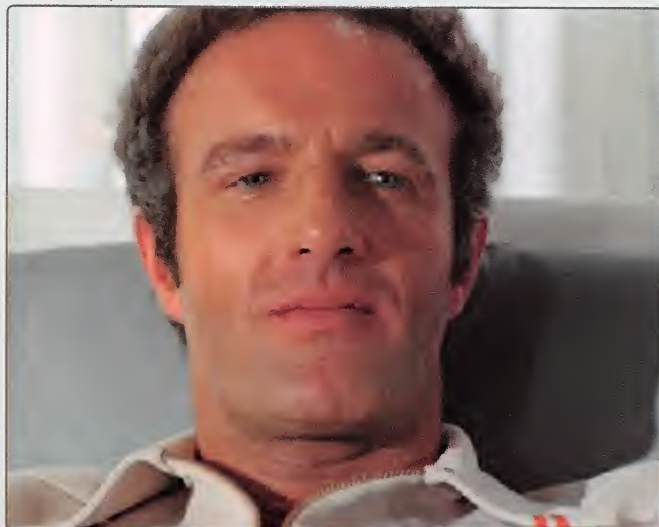
YES MINISTER

Roadshow, G

An eerily timeless look into the world of bureaucracy, Yes Minster rings true with anyone who's wise to the ways of the big bad world, be the sector public or private. This disc of the very first series includes the pilot episode, which seems a little threadbare without the intro cartoons by Scarfe, or the streamlined scripts of the later seasons. Still, there are some classics in here, like the one where Hacker's daughter threatens to participate in a nude badger protest. While this show is repeated endlessly on the ABC, this disc would serve as a suitable backup in the event that John Howard ever manages to destroy Aunty.

4/5

A KNIGHT'S TALE

Columbia Tristar, M 15+

Surprisingly non-awful. By juxtaposing 70s rock hits with medieval violence, this rags to riches tale follows the spirit, if not the letter of Chaucer's works. That is, by providing the unwashed masses (us) with vulgar, popular entertainment. A punchy, irreverent script, some high grade acting talent, legions of toothless Czech extras, and some genuine laughs may make this worth renting long before it snakes its way onto TV. You wouldn't know any of it from the trailer, which had audiences groaning across the land. The important thing, as always, is to suspend disbelief. Getting drunk would probably help, too.

3/5

LAIN VOL 4

Madman, M

The conclusion of another high-quality anime series, and another high quality local anime release. Madman appears to be staffed entirely by anime fans, dedicated to cramming each and every disc with the flashiest menus, the most extras, and the best content. In short, they care. As a result, Australian anime DVDs are often superior to the US and UK counterparts. This is in stark contrast to say, Disney, which is more interested in putting spyware in your hard drive than releasing the huge Miyazaki back-catalogue they've got locked in the vaults. Pity poor Lain, then, who's got spyware in her brain. Great show, by the way.

4/5

SPACE

Roadshow, E

"Wow. Infotainment!" Sam Neill stars in a lowbrow look at the infinite cosmos around us, widescreen enhanced.Learn all about how the universe was created in a "big bang," and how some dead stars collapse into "black holes." What? You already knew that? Well, in that case Space is an amusing look into how recent advances in space science have already made this series, barely a year old, obsolete. For instance, the Milky Way is depicted all through the series as a spiral galaxy. We now know that it's a barred spiral galaxy (Well excuse me all to hell - Ed). At least it's easier on the eyes than Bicentennial Man.

2/5

XANADU

Universal, PG

Truly, relentlessly disturbing. This is the definitive 1980s roller-disco musical, starring Australia's own Olivia Neutron-Bomb. Now with remastered sound and vision on DVD, the true genre of Xanadu is revealed: acid flick. Increasingly surreal visuals of skating muses, hybrid 40s/80s pop music numbers, and (for the time) cutting edge special effects make this pig's breakfast of a movie perversely compelling. A cinematic train wreck, perfect for putting on with the sound down at your next social function. And when you want the guests to leave, turn the sound back up! The ultimate in retro, Xanadu will rock your world.

4/5

INBOX

Dear PC Powerplay,
I am writing in response to

TWO SIDES OF THE CASTLE 1

I would like to start off by saying that I love your magazine, I have only been reading since issue #64 but I am already hooked. I love the CD Powerplays.

Anyway, I received a copy of Return to Castle Wolfenstein this Christmas and gleefully spent a couple of hours playing it. When I reached the second level I almost had a heart attack. The re-animated enemies in this level were shockingly realistic, incredibly smart and bloody f*@$ing hard to kill. As I went into my room to change my undies, I contemplated just how far computer gamesand I had come. My first computer was a dodgy thing and my first game was Descent 2, a spacefighting sim. I now own such great titles as Diablo 2, Deus Ex and Black & White. Computers and Games have come a long way in graphics, software, storylines, originality and enjoyment. I think we are all very lucky to have such amazing distractions to take us away from the drudgery of our own lives.

Stewart
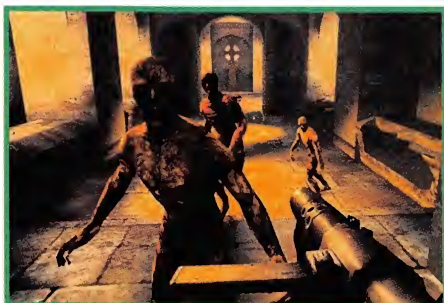
TWO SIDES OF THE CASTLE 2

Let me just say that the score your review gave Return to Castle Wolfenstein was WAY too high. Everyone was excited by Return to Wolf leading up to the release but hey, call a goose a goose, would you?

The opening few levels were great and I loved the first snifter of ghouls and demonics but Christ how crappy was the rest of the game? Like waiting for water to boil... I can't be the only one to have bought this game and been disappointed by it.

I guess I would've bought it even if you had panned the game but geez, I just had to have a moan!

Hendo

There you go, even the big games can excite/disappoint different players. By the way, with the strong multiplayer element of RtCW, we feel comfortable with our score of 89%.

CARTOGRAPHY

I have been playing games since I was six and I've always loved it and I have actually found something almost as good - Mapping. Once you develop your uber skillz at gaming you start to finish games pretty quick so with Half-Life I played around with worldcraft.

After a month or two (and some handy tutorials) I was making maps that would get around 5-7 out of ten at map sites and now I can use the Red Faction editor and UnrealEd. The satisfaction you will get when you join a Red Faction server only to find they are running your map is like seeing your kids become celebrities. So I encourage you all, LEARN AN EDITOR. It takes time sure but what doesn't. (Love that optimism - Ed.)

In a few years you might end up being paid by Valve to make maps which you already do for fun. So stop reading this and get out there. Give games the community they need. Make maps, make mods and make the games we so dearly love a whole lot better.

Sam Geater
wollongong
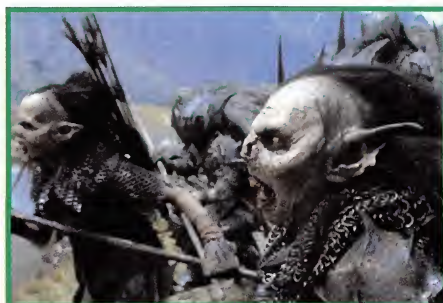
IMAGINE THIS...

Now, who agrees that LOTR is an awesome movie? And who agrees that Baldur's Gate 2 is an awesome game? Well, I've found that BG2 has some aspects ripped straight from Middle Earth itself (don't get me wrong, they did a great job). So logic dictates that Interplay would grab that old license that they used to create LOTR on SNES and make a BG2/LOTR mod. And, rather than having the fellowship, why not have your own characters? Sub-Quests based around Middle Earth and a UberQuest based on the destruction of the One Ring!

There could be new kits based on Middle Earth- Elf-Lords, Nazgul (with horse), Numenorian Warriors (like Aragorn and Isildur) and the Uruk-Hai (exclusive to Half-Orc). And more spells like that thing where Saruman makes Gandalf break-dance and then fly up into the sky, or element control, like Arwen's trick where she cleaned up the Nazgul at Rivendell. Running around Moria

+9 DESK SLAYING KNIVES

I'm no expert at RPGs but I do enjoy a Diablo romp, or an adventure in 'Darkstone'. I was amused recently when I realised that I had started to subconsciously ascribe values to my own professional qualities.

For example, I ran a very good corporate training session the other day, which boosted my communication skill to 102, and my enunciation skill to 96. I then responded well to some tricky technical enquiries, and earned myself a level up to both my renown and reliability skills (110 and 95 respectively). I needed a long lunch break after this, to boost my energy level, but was not surprised to find that this caused a drop in my efficiency rating from 120 down to 110. I then created a new online help document for a complex software application which saw my organisation and technical skills reach 110 and 115, which now means I can wield the Winhelp super weapon that I'd been working towards.

I was then lucky enough to craft a rare and powerful PowerPoint slide (with a special animation function) that added +5 to both my explanation and impressiveness attributes.

I wonder though if I can get some sort of hack to max out all my abilities without having to do all this hard work. Come to think of it, an editor capable of maxing my gold purse, would be even better...heh, cool, I just got a level up for my typing skill...

jbAce

This kind of dedication to a cause is admirable (+1 to Create Smokescreen Cast ability) but we think you've chosen the wrong path (+1 to placate loser feat). Rather than impose RPG elements on your real life, why not abandon your life to an RPG? (-1 to High level Logic). We suggest Dark Age of Camelot.

like a crazed lunatic with a couple of friends hunting orc doesn't sound too bad, now does it? LOTR Rules. BG2 Rules. Respect.

eVil_thaNe

EA has the rights to create games based on the current film trilogy and Vivendi Universal secured another license to create games based on the books. Not much left then, is there? EA's games will be released in line with the Two Towers film, so Christmas 2002.

FIFTY BUCKS?!!??!?!

Hello, I was just walking down the gaming aisle of a Kmart store when I saw a box containing the DOOM trilogy and another box with the three Quake games. I picked up both and was about to walk to the counter to purchase them both when I saw the Price. $50 EACH!!! Are the games actually worth that much? I don't think so. In the last issue of your fine magazine on page fourteen of issue 69, there is Quake2 for sale for the low price of $9.90. Quake1 can't be any dearer, which means that number 3 is $20. Is that fairly priced?

DOOM is an old outdated game which would be less then $10 (being older then Quake,) which means that it would only cost $30 all up one would think. How much do games actually cost to make? I paid $90 for Deus Ex, which I don't actually have a problem with, as it is the best game ever, but does it actually cost that much to make? Are game makers greedy or am I just a tight-arse?

Zachary Harper

As you say, you can find a fair(er) price sooner or later if you look hard enough. But maybe $50 is a good price for the pack: convenience, manuals (presumably), etc. of three of the best games ever. In short, game makers are greedy and yes, you are a tight-arse – but a discerning tight-arse.

WEST COAST STYLE

I live in Perth, and I've just been lucky enough to finally get cable internet installed. "Great" I thought, I can get pings of 20 in Counter-Strike, download files at awesome speeds, and enjoy all the other comforts of broadband - even if Telstra charge $71 a month.

ERRR WRONG!! Guess what I discovered, there's no Perth router. What does that mean? Basically Telstra are tight SOB's, so rather than giving Perth its own traffic router, all data travels over east to one of the servers over in Sydney or something. That means that if I want to play a game on a Perth server, my data has to travel over east, where it is then sent over west to the server, before the response is then sent back east again, redirected and sent back to me over west. The result of this? Ridiculous pings that I could beat with my old analogue connection (like 160 up to 220). It now means that I have to play on over-crowded Eastern States servers, with Pings of 50-80.

You probably think "I'd kill for a ping that low" - but when I'm paying $71 a month and I already have to put up with a 3gb bandwidth cap (including upstream, not just downstream) not to mention a 512Kbit speed cap, I have reason to be peeved off. Apparently ADSL gets the same treatment over west too.

The moral of the story? If you're in WA, don't get broadband yet - just wait a sec. Optus are thinking about doing their own ADSL service, and you'll also be able to get pay TV over it too. The speed's great, don't get me wrong. But if you can wait a bit longer for better competition to arrive, do it.

Shane Butler
Perth WA

PS: When I phoned up Telstra, I had to explain to the techie about the data going east - he denied that there was no Perth router at first - then he said "ohh, there's nothing Telstra can do about that at the moment. It would cost too much."

CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

Your latest issue (#70) looks great. Thanks for listening to reader feedback and returning to a cleaner text layout. It's great that you are trying to improve the magazine but know when to quit. The "X Raid" and "Games of 2002" articles are good examples of articles that look great but are also easy to read.

Since you seem to listen to reader feedback, here's my 2 cents. Could we please see less content from your forums? Issue 70 had two and a half pages of forum. If I want to read some guy named "StalkerX" spout his poorly edited, spur of the moment opinion, there's plenty of that on the net. You can keep the letters section. For some reason people think more before they write a letter.

While I've got your attention, why hasn't the games industry produced any Star Control clones? The world doesn't need another RTS game. Star Control 2 was so well done, I would love to see other companies produce some variants on that gameplay. Vangers is about the closest to a Star Control game I can think of.

Tony
Shellharbour

Developer:	Barking Dog
Publisher:	Crave Entertainment
Distributor:	Infogrames
Due:	March/April

Global Operations
Tentatively subtitled Counter-Strike Killer

That rock-painting of a chopper looks so realistic...

Cloister fight! Booyah!

I f you're a Counter-Strike fan or former Team Fortress lover you're probably already familiar with Global Operations as it has received a lot of attention in the online fan media. Barking Dog set out to create a game designed for multiplayer team action straight out of the box. Unlike many recent FPS releases that boasted fully worked single player games, such as Wolfenstein and Medal of Honor, Global Operations has a single player game that is more like that of Unreal Tournament, a bot fest training session for the real thing. There is also a very short supply of Nazis - in fact none at all.

with a massive selection of armaments to choose from. In a refreshing departure from the usual cliches, Global Operations resists the urge to place you in the expected terrorist or counter-terrorist role. Instead players take on the identities of specific teams: military, para-military or even civilian law enforcement.

The tantalising thought of being able to recreate the many bungled Police raids from the history files of the NSW Police Service is already getting us very excited. The Bad Guys in the game, the terrorists or anti-Americans can be card carrying para-military rebels or just well armed hooligans. They have the

heavily emphasise team work and a coherent strategy. Sometimes a team has more than one objective to complete. Some maps are very much like the Assault levels from UT, where a team has to accomplish a series of connected objectives. A good example of all this in action is the mission in which Russian specialists are ordered to take out anti-aircraft guns so that friendly air units can clear a mountain pass. Once the pass is cleared, then the team can go in and assassinate the terrorist bad boy.

I'm Going In...

One really major difference between Global Ops and Counter-Strike is the impermanence of death. Respawning works the same way as it does in Return to Castle Wolfenstein, with a reinforcement round every twenty-thirty seconds or thereabouts. Also during the reinforcement period players can switch classes or buy weapons and equipment instead of just sitting around scratching themselves. The reward system comes into play here as well. If you've whooped some ass in your last incarnation there'll be plenty of cash to buy up the best weapons and equipment. If, more likely, you've been wasted quickly a few times in a row you might end up on the blunt end of a pocket knife looking for a

Global Ops combines the class system of Team Fortress with the gameplay structure of CounterStrike

But I Already Got One

So what does Global Operations offer that Counter-Strike doesn't? For a start, it combines the class system of Team Fortress with the gameplay structure of CS. It gives players a choice of one of six character types slugging it out team style in various objective-based missions. The money based reward system allows you to re-equip before respawning

same team members, weapons and abilities as the goody guys but usually have more interesting names like Julio and Achmed Ali Khan IV.

Each map or mission has a spiel which helps outline the general objectives that the teams need to achieve. The missions don't just require you to 'own' the map and can demand quite different tactics from one other. The mission objectives also

A little bit of tampering will put this bom to rights...

Plenty of opponents on screen...

Breach the gates and send in the boys

The ever-popular Sniper Cam

If you don't let me in babe, I'll shoot my way in!

An absolutely insane array of weapons

Knife on Luger... I like those odds

dark corner to cower in. Eliminating the fear of missing a round also makes Global Ops a much faster paced game than CS - players are far more willing to throw themselves around when they can respawn!

Barking Dog has also made an attempt to balance the game in favour of skilled players, as opposed to players who use unrealistic and silly FPS tricks. In a controversial move the jump function has been made nearly useless as a damage dodging tactic. Jumping is slow and cumbersome, removing any chance of bouncing around and firing like a deranged Energiser bunny.

More Class than Arse

Each team is split into separate classes: sniper, commando, medic, reconnaissance, heavy gunner, and demolition man. Each with advantages and disadvantages that pretty much line up with Team Fortress equivalents. For example, the heavy gunner has the most powerful weapon, but his movement rate is slowest, whereas the reconnaissance dude only gets light protection and weapons, but boasts a radar device that can spot the location of other players.

Barking Dog has aimed to make the classes more balanced than their Team Fortress counterparts. For

example, the Sniper's scope is useful only when it is standing still. Make any movement and the scope drops out of sight. This is not only more realistic but it stops bunny snipers, people who jump out in front of windows, let loose with their sniper rifle, then duck back into cover again.

Hmm Pretty

There are very obvious visual differences between Global Ops and CS. Rightly so since Global is being developed five or so years after the engine that CS is built around. Global Ops uses the Lithtech 2.5 engine which has been heavily tweaked to get rid of the problems it suffered in previous outings. Lithtech is very good at rendering nice textures and weapon models and all the guns look fantastic. By the very latest standards the game does look a little bit dated but then again CS looks a lot dated!

The big challenge for Global Operations in the popularity stakes is in taking on its competitor Counter Strike. Sure it's new and sexy, but whether that's enough to make diehard CS players fork out their dough is another story.

George Soropos

WEAPONS

One of the aspects of Global Operations that gamers will surely love is the smorgasbord of available guns and gear, for a price. There are slots in your inventory for one of thirty two different primary weapons and many different secondary weapons, with the secondary type for most classes being a shotgun variety. There is a third slot for a pistol, several slots for grenades and special slots for explosives (for the demo guy) and night vision gear (for the recon dude) as well as other goodies. The weapons look great and have been modelled with high attention to detail. The entire arsenal ranges from sniper rifles to heavy machine guns. Should prove enough for any blood-thirsty gun-made psychopath. Or maybe that's just me. Yeah, that'd be it.

Developer:	Black Isles Studios
Publisher:	Interplay
Due:	2nd Qtr 2002

Icewind Dale II
More Ice, More Wind and more hack-n-slash

Old school graphics, new wave gameplay

Behold the purple things of wrath

Whether by fate or coincidence, Icewind Dale was released at the same time as the action RPG giant, Diablo II. And given that one of Black Isle Studios' design aims with IWD was to offer a simplified, Diablo-esque version of its award-winning, genre-revitalising and comparatively complex Baldur's Gate, it was surprising to see that IWD didn't fade away under Diablo II's captivating light.

Indeed, its fate was brighter. While Diablo II went on to top the charts and become a truly mainstream best-selling game, Icewind Dale proved itself to be the quiet achiever. It garnered strong support from

character kits will allow players to further specialise their play experience from the base of the usual class and race suspects

the RPG community with a simple formula: a linear dungeon-hack enriched with a robust plot, using the Advanced Dungeons & Dragons 2nd Edition rule set (as made possible by BioWare's Infinity Engine).

Let's Dance Again

It should come as no surprise that with its recently announced - and, surprisingly imminent -

sequel, Icewind Dale II, Black Isle Studios is not taking to that formula with hammer and anvil. IWD2 is similarly billed as a linear hack 'n' slash RPG with a strong focus on player character advancement, in keeping with the tone of the original.

It is set in the same region of the first - the Ten Towns scattered around the area of Icewind Dale and the Spine of the World mountain range of D&D's Faerun. A full generation after the events of Icewind Dale, IWD2 sees a band of would-be adventurers (you and your party) answer the call of a town besieged by nasty monsters. You are soon sent to investigate, and your travels to the root of the evil

will take a long adventure through a number of different environments.

Of course, this wouldn't be a Black Isle studios sequel without some form of enhancements brought to the mix. IWD2's former lead designer JE Sawyer, who was recently moved to another title in progress at Black Isle (we've placed our bets on a game with the word "fallout" in the title, but not

"tactics" - however, we digress...), has gone on the record saying: "The team is very familiar with the Infinity Engine, giving us a short development cycle that is unlikely to cause many unforeseen problems to arise. We're manning all guns to make sure the product we put out is something we can feel proud of."

Show Me Infinity

The Infinity Engine - which was given its first breath with Baldur's Gate back in 1998 - will again be used in this outing, marking its eighth incarnation (counting the various expansion packs released along the way) in computer game form. Each new version of an Infinity-powered title has built upon the previous, and Black Isle has made no exception with the latest. IWD2 will feature the usual addition of game assets (meaning loads of new monsters, items, art, areas and spells) and the inclusion of character kits (as first seen in Baldur's Gate II) - which will allow players to further specialise their play experience from the base of the usual class and race suspects. Another first is the ability to play other races: Tieflings and Aasimar - as seen in Black Isle's Planescape Torment - will be selectable from the character creation screen.

More importantly, IWDII will feature the most

No comment

An entire world to explore, by sea as well as land

It's ogre-tastic!

Mysterious, wanton, misunderstood - March Stepnik

This on the other hand seems to be our editor... (You're fired - Ed)

Male Drider
You can get a cream for that

"I'm old, but not too old to take you snaps."
Massive battles, crazy magic

Now with added dragons!

significant alteration to the AD&D 2nd Edition engine since Baldur's Gate: the implementation of some core D&D 3rd edition rules.

"I'm Attacking the Darkness..."

To Hit against Armour Class 0 (THAC0) has been replaced with base attack bonus, armour class will scale up from 10 and will use distinct AC bonus types, and ability scores will now use 3E scaling. Now, if this last sentence made about as much sense as an advanced thesis on anti-matter, you're neither alone nor far off the mark.

"Though some may consider those changes to be trivial or, at worst, detrimental to overall gameplay, they actually allow us to make things clearer for the player," muses J.E. Sawyer. Black Isle Studios has been acutely aware of the double-edged sword that is the D&D license: players of the pen and paper RPG have praised the translation of the complex rule set into the computer RPG environment, while everybody else has had to deal with its verbosity by either sinking or learning how to swim very quickly.

In layman's terms, the implementation of 3E rules should result in a more obvious - and perhaps an easier to understand - relationship between stats, modifiers (conditions which affect your characters "power"), and game world function.

In game terms, one of the benefits of using base attack bonus means that ALL characters will receive a bonus to their attack value as they go up a level. As a result, weaker melee classes like thieves and mages should be able to hold their own in combat, as opposed to their porcelain-like constitution of previous Infinity Engine titles.

Being Slayed by Elves

However easier to grasp, a Diablo 2 this sequel ain't and players new to D&D will still need to get their head around this powerful yet complicated hybrid of 2nd and 3rd edition rules.

Still, not all changes to the engine are sanctioned by the 3E rules. Character creation will be similar to Planescape Torment's: the die roll will not be simulated to provide ability scores at character creation. Instead, each character starts with the same base ability scores, and the player raises ability values from a pool of points.

Yes, you've read correctly - character WILL have to be created from scratch: players start IWD as first level characters. For balance issues, Black Isle set IWD2 a generation after the events of IWD, and as a consequence, character importation from IWD will be impossible.

Icewind Dale II entered the production phase soon after the free add-on for IWD - Trials of the Luremaster - was completed in the winter of 2001. With a modest team (a number of people from the now defunct RPG Torn team have been placed on IWD2) and familiarity with the game engine, Black Isle Studios have announced that IWD2 will ship at the end of May.

Given their wealth of experience, Icewind Dale 2 should be something Black Isle Studios and JE Sawyer can be very proud of indeed. Even if it's not a Diablo killer.

March Stepnik

DUNGEON SIEGE

He wasn't born in a barn, he wasn't born in a Crossfire Hurricane, he was born in a dungeon. So Daniel Staines is the perfect person to talk for hours to Chris Taylor about the game that might just ring the death-knell for Diablo 2.

Dazzling spell effects on the battlefield

"Baggins... Shire..."

Hand to hand combat in stunning 3D

Enormous environments to explore

They say that after two or three glasses, bad Chardonnay tastes good and good Chardonnay tastes better. I reflect on this as I swirl around my third goblet of Microsoft's finest, wondering just how much the free-flowing drink is going to affect my opinion of Chris Taylor's upcoming Dungeon Siege presentation. After all, the heady combination of free booze and flirtatious PR floozies certainly does have a way of making even the most jaded journo see things in a more positive light. The idea dawns on me that perhaps this is what Microsoft had intended all along. I take another sip from a glass that never seems to empty and try not to think about it. Only a few more minutes till...

Chris Taylor takes the stage. The room fills with the sound of applause as this jocular, slightly chubby figure briefly acknowledges the audience and quickly takes a seat behind a laptop setup in front of a large projection screen. Almost immediately, this screen is illuminated with Dungeon Siege's front-end and Taylor begins to talk excitedly about the game's simple and direct interface. As he does so, I stare at my half empty

glass and can't help thinking that I'll probably want to get another one soon if Dungeon Siege is going to inspire me enough to write five pages worth of florid prose about it.

And then the character setup screen disappears and Taylor enters the gameworld. Those members of the audience who hadn't previously seen Dungeon Siege running on one of the many high-powered PC's lying about the room let fly a collective gasp. The beauty of the game being played before us is breathtaking. While staring fixedly at the action on screen, I fumble clumsily for a table upon which to put my glass. I don't need alcohol anymore, I decide - this is intoxicating enough.

"This world we've just immersed ourselves in," Taylor begins after the initial hubbub dies down, " is 3D and continuous. We'll never see another loading screen again". That one, simple statement may very well be the most exciting thing we've heard come out of a developer's mouth this year. Of course we'd heard about this feature before seeing a demonstration by its creator, but I don't think any of us had ever stopped to consider the

I'll take two Sherbies and a bag of Jelly Bellies
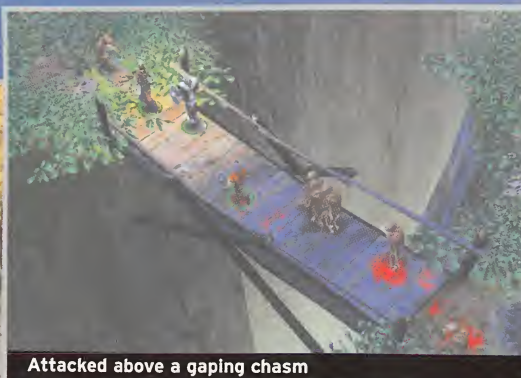
Attacked above a gaping chasm

Blue Dragons... we can't wait

SIEGE EDITOR

Of his Siege Engine, Chris Taylor says this: "We've built so much technology to get this game going that's it's frightening. Now, we're turning the tools we used to make that technology - unmodified - over to people who want to make RPG games."

He's not lying about that 'frightening' part - the Siege Editor is arguably the most powerful proprietary tool to ever be turned over to the public by a game development studio. Coupled with the Gmax graphics design program, the editor will not be limited by the conventional constraints of publicly released proprietary technology and mod enthusiasts. According to Taylor, it will be able to essentially create entirely new worlds simply by editing Dungeon Siege's existing universe. Furthermore, the more adventurous modders can even learn Skrit - Dungeon Siege's unique programming language - and build what are essentially entire new games using the Siege Engine as a basis for their endeavours. If this is true, then the potential the Siege Editor has in the hands of skilled designers is enormous. Just imagine - it would, theoretically speaking, be entirely possible to re-create some of the world's greatest RPGs in glorious, limitlessly large 3D. How does Ultima IV with GeForce powered graphics and no loading screens sound to you? Or what about an updated version of the original Diablo with a massively extended playworld powered by a true 3D engine? If the mod community takes to Dungeon Siege the way we think they will, it's going to be more than just a good game - it's going to be platform for some of the most expansive and ambitious mods of all time.

Hectic battles with the forces of darkness

Interiors are as common as vast outdoor scenes

Fiery guys with badness on their minds

The bridge that stunned us at the Dungeon Siege launch...

... when Chris started to rotate around the battling figures

immense implications it has for Dungeon Siege and computer gaming at large. In a voice twanging with all the pride of a craftsman showing off his masterwork, Taylor elaborates on some of these implications:

"As I'm playing, the game is streaming the world in which allows us to keep the density and richness of that world very high and very populated with a lot of subtlety and minutiae. You see, it has no limits - we can build worlds in all dimensions that bend and stretch in any way. So, rather than say 'here's a grid and I get to explore this grid and go to the next level', we have this gigantic, arbitrary level that keeps going on and on infinitely. It's like you're in a dream that you don't have to awaken out of until you're done playing"

The analogy is apt. Due to the enormous flexibility of the Siege Engine, Dungeon Siege is easily the most engaging and expansive game of its type and when this is coupled with a strong fantasy driven narrative the experience one gets from playing it is indeed comparable to falling into some fantastic dream. Gas Powered Games (GPG) have created a world without seams; a world where one may journey for hours and hours on end in any direction - in all three dimensions - without ever being jarred out of the experience by the usual pitfalls of interactive entertainment. If one is lucky enough to play Dungeon Siege on a moderately beefy PC, it becomes quickly apparent that acknowledging the limitations of technology is never a necessity. GPG have created a game where a keyboard never has to be pushed back in impatience, where everything that can happen does so without the aid of creeping red percentage bar. Essentially, what Chris Taylor and his team have created here is a game where its never necessary to stop and say to oneself 'Oh well, I suppose it's just a game after all'. And that is a huge achievement in anyone's books.

Amazingly, however, it is not an achievement that has come at the cost of aesthetic beauty. One might reasonably expect that an essentially infinite world such as the one in Dungeon Siege would inevitably suffer from a lack of graphical detail so common to simulated landscapes of an expansive nature. Not so. Though Taylor is quick to concede that several cosmetic features had to be abandoned in favour of increased performance -

such as facial animation and some of the more elaborate spell effects - he is also hasty to point out the finer points of his game's general aesthetic, particularly the environmental fading. "We can not only fade out roofs and floors," he says with obvious pride, "we can fade out the whole world."

He has good reason to be proud. You see, Dungeon Siege's environmental fading not only makes it possible to implement the continuous streaming technology powering the game, but it also complements the overall aesthetic by making sure that a gamer's immersion never has to be broken by shonky camera mechanics. Think about it: if objects fade out imperceptibly in a world that's limitlessly large, why would you ever have to fiddle around with the camera in order to get an unobstructed vantage point? The answer, obviously, is that you wouldn't and that is exactly what Chris Taylor wants to hear.

To him, a good game isn't about fiddling with a camera for 30 minutes or compensating for the inadequacies of a developer's design restrictions, it's about getting into the action and staying there. This is precisely why Dungeon Siege is home to one of the sleekest, most finely refined skill systems yet seen in a CRPG. There is no virtual dice rolling, no skill point allocation and no complex class system to navigate. Instead, Dungeon Siege lets the player get into the action and dynamically adapt their character according to the way they

you play, not according to the way you think you should play. This further enhances the already strong feeling of immersion one gets when playing Dungeon Siege, as obtuse statistic and skill juggling would only detract from the game's bravado laden atmosphere. Real heroes don't carry 12-sided die.

This system not only works beautifully for the single player quest, but it also considerably spices up Dungeon Siege's multiplayer component as well. Instead of pre-planning a entire game strategy for an 8 man team on the menu screen, multiplayer dungeon crawlers can simply jump into the game and then adapt their character's role to suit the context of the situations they become involved in. The resulting multiplayer component will be more flexible and dynamic as teammates can evolve their characters to complement each other's strengths and weaknesses, meaning that teams will act like teams instead of gangs of individual specialists.

Further enhancing Dungeon Siege's multiplayer component is that fact that GPG have created an entirely separate world for multiplayer gamers to romp around in. Taylor elaborates: "We not only built a single player world to play through, we built a completely different multiplayer world too. Since our development tools are so good, it's easy to build big worlds like that fast. So, when you've spent 50 hours or so playing through the single player game, you can play

> Dungeon Siege is easily the most engaging and expansive game of its type... the experience is comparable to falling into some fantastic dream.

play the game. Taylor does not, as he briskly commented at the beginning of the demonstration, want us to "go through a big ordeal just to get playing the damn game you just bought".

"My character starts off with no skill and no classification," he explains, "I can just find out who I am through playing." We have no hesitation in saying that this kind of system is the future for role-playing games. Forcing one to decide how they're going to play a game before they've even seen how it works is a frustrating and increasingly dated dynamic. What GPG is offering is a game where your character evolves according to the way

another 50 to 70 in multiplayer with seven of your friends".

Moreover, the sheer size of this second multiplayer world is simply astounding.

After hearing Taylor excitedly talk about the vast mountain ranges, sprawling forests and deep subterranean dungeons multiplayer parties can expect to trek through, we're convinced that it could easily rival the size of several famous MMORPG worlds. Unlike most MMORPGs, though, Dungeon Siege's continuous world technology will ensure that players with super-beast computers do not have a crippling advantage over their less

Inhuman nasties assailed the little hut

"We have arrows and we are prepared to use them"

Did we fail to mention the Red Dragons?

Taylor's primary design goal with Dungeon Siege was to reinvent a stagnating genre... by "adding all the cool stuff" others had left out.

fortunate brethren. As Chris Taylor is obviously aware, there's nothing more annoying than missing out on all the action simply because of yet another long loading screen.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about Dungeon Siege, however, is the curious coalition of the RTS and RPG genres that act as the game's driving mechanic. Aside from the fact that one can order their party into military style formations at the click of a button, it is also possible to lay waypoints and set individual behaviour parameters for your characters ("They fight on their own. In Dungeon Siege, you can have any behaviour you want"). The latter feature is aptly - if inadvertently - demonstrated by Taylor when, after setting his units to act semi-autonomously, he frequently address the audience using both of his hands to gesticulate while his party continues to follow orders in the background. Additions such as these and others - including a dynamic top-down map and a Baldur's Gate style 'pause-and-command' function - lend Dungeon Siege an air of strategic depth wholly missing in other action-oriented RPGs of a similar nature.

And while we're on that topic of 'RPGs of a similar nature', it's worth pointing out to the more cynical reader that Dungeon Siege is not merely a technology driven update of an ageing paradigm - a Diablo 2002, as it were. As with Total Annihilation, Taylor's primary design goal with Dungeon Siege was to reinvent a stagnating genre simply by, as he says, "adding all the cool stuff" that he thought other developer's had left out. With TA, the result was a product that almost single-handedly raised the

bar for real-time strategy and received over 50 various awards for excellence from industry pundits. And now, with his own company and the endless money sacks of Microsoft backing him up, he looks set to repeat that success again. Indeed, if this game is only Diablo 2002, then Blizzard certainly have big boots to fill come Diablo 2003.

"It's really quite sad," comments Taylor as he slowly rises from his chair, "that there's so much to show in this game. Every time I do a demo, I miss so many things." And with that, he shuts down his laptop and the projection screen goes white again. The demonstration is over. I join the rest of the room in giving an appreciative round of applause and then take my half-empty (yes, half-empty) wineglass to the bar and exchange it for a pitcher of water. From underneath a swarthy black cape emblazoned with the GPG logo, a barman mentions to me that Dungeon Siege looks to be one mighty impressive game. I agree and inquire if he's a gamer. 'No,' he replies, 'but I don't think you'd have to be to know that what was on that screen looked damn good.'

If Dungeon Siege has one thing going for it, I think to myself, then it's comments like that. The flexibility of Chris Taylor's game design and the immense power of the Siege Engine have ensured that GPG's inaugural title will be almost universal in its appeal. The only problem that remained now would be calming down enough to actually sit down and write 5 pages worth of preview text for it. I begin to wonder if there's any Chardonnay left...

We've stumbled into Fallout somehow...

"I hope that big fella is friendly"
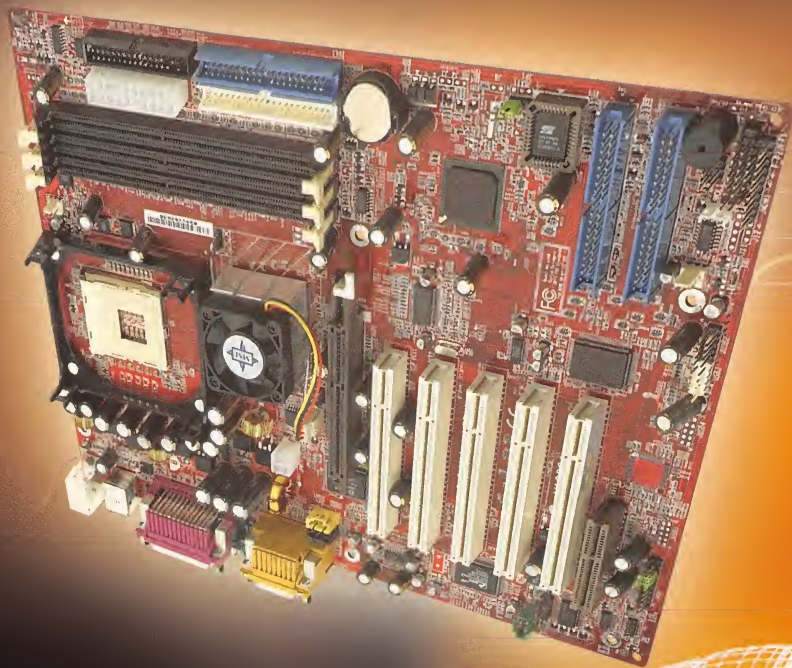
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Link to the Future

"Now a dark shadow has fallen over the lands of Azeroth, threatening to extinguish all life - all hope. The drums of war play upon the winds once again - rising urgently towards the inevitable hour when the skies will rain fire - and the world will tremble before the coming of the Burning Legion. The Day of Judgment has come..."

TALES OF WAR

The Massing Clouds of Warcraft 3

The stage is set for a new saga in the fantasy epic that began with a magical orc invasion of human territory some six years ago. In the real world, it was a mass invasion of homes across the globe by the original Warcraft. Blizzard has been hammering out gaming monuments since the company was a third party developer Silicon & Synapse, later as Chaos Studios and since 1994, as Blizzard Entertainment. Along the way, the team has produced some of the most memorable games ever, including The Lost Vikings, Diablo, Diablo II, Starcraft, as well as various expansions. The first title designed and produced by Blizzard Entertainment was Warcraft: Orcs and Humans. It was huge, selling over 100,000 copies in its first year. Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos is the third title in the strategy series but is a successor to more than just the fantasy battle heritage of Warcraft and the ground-breaking Warcraft II, also a bestseller with over 3 million copies sold worldwide.

Walking a new road

Blizzard sequels are set firmly in the groundwork of their predecessors but frequently bring something entirely new to the experience. The strengths of Warcraft II: Battle.net were transplanted to a new extraterrestrial setting in StarCraft (1998), with the addition of a third race to the battle brew. This opened up opportunities to expand the varieties of play for Warcraft fans with unique structures and units for the Terrans, Protoss and Zerg races. Although Battle.net combat would always be a strong part of Starcraft, Blizzard pioneered an interesting approach to storytelling that helped to inject vitality and personality into each of the factions. The strong sense of setting has helped Starcraft become an amazingly popular RTS and remain a fixture in the big PC tournaments around the world. Just as Starcraft was a sequel to

Warcarft II, in a real sense Warcraft III is also the sequel to Starcraft. It ups the race count from three to four, with the Humans and the Orcs joined by the Undead and the Night Elves (that's two entirely new races for Warcraft). It features non-player characters, neutral units and structures that widen combat options and it brings Blizzard strategy into a full 3D setting.

But anyone could have guessed these additions to a Blizzard sequel -

it's the more subtle changes that will mark Warcraft III as unique. These include a smaller group combat focus, with more individual unit personality, hero units that gain experience and feature inventories as well as a new legend in the growing struggle for the sprawling lands of wartorn Azeroth. This is the first glimpse of battle to come, the beginnings of a new Warcraft conflict

Marn Thunderhorn

The five powers to face off in the Reign of Chaos saga are the Humans, the Orcs, the Night Elves, the Undead and the Burning Legion. The Humans and Orcs return from Warcraft II much the same as ever and their rivalry remains - as will some of their heroes. These past wars occurred only 15 years prior to the beginning of Warcraft III and the wounds dealt between these traditional enemies heal slowly.

The humans are a young, industrious race that lacks the ancient history of the others. Humanity will be the most familiar to RTS players, with its force of noble armed warriors and, of course, powerful magic summoners.

The biggest change for the Orcs is their liberation from the corruption of the Burning Legion and the revival of their ancient and noble shamanistic traditions. Orcs no longer use Warlock magic and necromancy. Led by the guiding hand of Thrall the Orc chieftain (and protagonist of the now-axed Warcraft Adventures game), their magic users practise Shaman magic, drawing power from the

elements and the natural world. Their forces are also returning to their ancient origins in hand-to-hand combat.

New Blood

The Night Elves are the oldest race in the Warcraft history and in the distant past were the first to learn magic. Their reckless misuse of this power drew the Burning Legion into the world and triggered the first war. They finally banished their enemies from Azeroth but not before their homeland was destroyed. As a result, they abandoned their magic. The Night Elves are based on the idea of Transformation - they are nocturnal living creatures of the forest, shadowy and powerful with nature.

The Undead, known as The Scourge, were created by The Burning Legion to cause terror throughout Azeroth ahead of the Legion's own invasion. They don't build on the land - they corrupt the very earth and place their vile edifices atop the Blight. These ghouls and lichs are led by Ner'zhul, who controlled the Orcs in Warcraft II: Beyond the Dark Portal. But even Ner'zhul wants revenge on

his demon rulers for damning him to this fate. The Night Elves and The Undead will both benefit from the Day/Night cycle that is part of Warcraft III. By night, both enjoy the regeneration of health and the Elves can shadow meld, or become invisible.

This fifth and last faction is the root of all that is ultimately evil in Azeroth. The Burning Legion corrupted Orcs and masterminded their invasion through a dimensional portal from Draenor in the original story of Warcraft. Early in development, Blizzard considered making the Burning Legion a playable race but as the most evil and most powerful force, they would be difficult to balance. The Burning Legion will remain one of the big surprises of the single player campaign.

Each race is different enough that their abilities do not overlap significantly. The multiplayer game enables alliances between different races and Blizzard has gone to great lengths to enable the relative strengths of each to compliment those of an allied force. This should be the most obvious revision of the

Warcraft multiplayer and tangibly change the way each game is played.

Blizzard have created a truly complex story setting for the Reign of Chaos and the political nuances and shifting relationships between the races is set to be central to the single player experience. The story is being keep under wraps (understandably) but with Chris Metzen, who was responsible for the StarCraft epic involved, Blizzard promises at some new faces, some old favourites and more than a few plot twists and turns. This dense mythology will set the scene for future Warcraft stories, principally the Online RPG presently in production, World of Warcraft.

For a myriad of reasons, Warcraft III is far more concerned with the characters, the people and the events than previous Blizzard strategy games. This is immediately obvious from the tighter focus of the camera on the battlefield. The camera can zoom right in but not right out to the stratosphere. Warcraft III combat situations involve fewer, more powerful units and a shift away from the frantic resource gathering and the

heavy production of generic cannon fodder units.

Each race features around ten basic units with one or two being flying units. Comparing the basic combat units of the four races illustrates the kind of variety in troops. The human footman is a defensive unit with a Defend Mode; the Orcish Grunt is an offensive unit that can assume a Berserker Rage; the Elven archer is a high-speed unit and the Scourge's Ghoul can regenerate itself by feasting on the flesh of the fallen. This gives a hint of the kind of variety of each side. Balancing the four races means that the final maximum numbers of units is likely to differ for each side. Just as in Starcraft, research can augment the powers of standard units. All of the troops are created with a high level of detail in animation and a variety of specific sound bytes to give them identity on the battlefield.

Heroes for the people

Warcraft III will introduce character-based hero units that lead the charge through the various missions and are involved in larger roles in the story and in combat. These Legendary Heroes are distinctive amongst other troops, and possess greater and more diverse powers. Churning out units to throw at the enemy is a thing of the past, with the focus of battle on "who" is under your command rather than "how many".

The heroes are not merely units to be delivered safely across the map, they are characters with strengths and abilities that benefit not only themselves but the units around them. Heroes, like ordinary units are "bought" with command points and as many can be used as the player likes. The choice is balanced against the need to maintain a standing army of sufficient size.

**Magic user Heroes like the Arch-Mage, can summon powerful units to the battlefield to aid the cause, like the Water Elemental, a giant body of

water that throws itself into enemy units with all its force. One of the Night Elves heroes is the Demon Hunter, a ritually blinded warrior. Their affliction allows these units to see demons and the undead more clearly and to call on demonic power to augment their attacks. Rather than being ordinary units with more power and speed, legendary heroes are unique in their skills, power, stature and they will be a good deal bigger than other units.**

Level up

Heroes also increase in power (and size on screen) by gaining levels through completing missions and participating in battle. Each level increases their three abilities: Strength, Intelligence and Agility as well as opening up further spells and special abilities.

Legendary heroes feature inventory slots. These allow for the collection of special items, pivotal to a particular campaign or of notable power, that bestow various effects like

hit point regeneration and charming of units. These elements should present a nice twist on the traditional single player campaign, with the focus on a smaller band of units led by a powerful, versatile, multi-talented main character.

Magic to War By

The robust spell casting system means the player can use offensive spells, defensive spells, spells that counter enemy magic, autocast spells that can be toggled to be cast automatically under certain conditions, auras and for the Hero units, an Ultimate spell that is achieved at Level 5. Also many items confer magical powers on the carrier and his allies.

By leading fewer units and instilling more narrative importance to individuals, Blizzard has diluted the importance of resource gathering and managing. The team originally decided to limit necessary resources to only one: gold. While lumber and gold have been restored as available resources, this demonstrates how far from the production queue mentality Blizzard is placing Warcraft III.

There are no walls in the game to protect bases and structures will be at a premium. The goal is obviously to discourage a base managing, resource hoarding, highly defensive game and plunge the player into a highly tactical battle situation more focussed on controlling units in the game world.

But don't believe that the game world will be void of anything save swarming combatants. An important addition to the game is the inclusion of neutral figures and structures that are designed to not only add some life and depth to the world but also serve in augmenting strategic options.

Creeps sound little...

Non-player inhabitants known as Creeps will be included to create the sense of a perilous fantasy world.

They may be protecting a hoard of valuables: gold, rare items or useful neutral buildings such as a Fountain of Life, that regenerates units' hit points or a Mercenary Camp, where other creeps can be hired to bolster a force. If the player's forces get too close, the creeps will attack whether it's The Scourge lurching by or the Elves frolicking past. The flying Red Dragon is a creep with fiery breath that attacks from the skies, while the Ogre Lord is a two-headed brute that often stands guard over gold mines.

The neutral structures include the Goblin Laboratory, the Goblin Merchant and the Marketplace. These establishments offer different services - for a price. Stepping into the Laboratory, for example, it is possible to hire some goblin sappers or to reveal certain sections of the map. Other structures will provide random useful items for sale that replenish periodically.

Engaging the player with the game environment is a high priority in Warcraft III and this also extends to terrain, as the lay of the land will have a direct effect on battle situations. Hills and stands of trees create line of sight boons (and disadvantages). High ground creates damage and defensive bonuses, to those facing down opponents. This impacts greatly

on the movement and placement of troops, especially as there are fewer of them to direct.

Pricking Ears

Sound will play an important role in Warcraft III, with Blizzard making a conscious effort to use elements like positional sound and unit & event specific effects to provide feedback to players, complimenting on-screen information. Unique sounds and prompts for all units and structures, in conjunction with visual signposts like auras, are designed to simplify gameplay. Each race's journey features a distinctive soundtrack for the all-important ambience of the piece.

The creative Warcraft fans can look forward to more control over the customisation of Warcraft III than in any previous Blizzard title. The world editor promises a comprehensive means to edit or create from scratch all aspects of the game: tile sets, character art, unit types, attributes, special abilities, spells, AI, quests, play balance statistics and mission objectives. It incorporates an easy-to-use 3D editor for mapmaking and goes so far as to even allow the creation of end sequence movies within the game engine. Behaviours and game events can be scripted using the extensive scripting

language that forms the more involved end of a robust editor.

Warcraft together

Multiplayer has received a great deal of attention in Warcraft III. Indeed the design decisions made for the single player campaign have been balanced for the Battle.net experience of the game. All the elements of the game including heroes, neutral structures, inventory and the focus on fewer units are designed to transform the Blizzard multiplayer experience, which itself has seen improvement. The new elements of the multiplayer game include shared unit control between allied players, trading of resources between players, alliances with computer players and an observation mode. Battle.net features a greater variety of ladders (including 1 on 1, 2 on 2 and clan), anonymous game matching as well as adjustments to clans allowing levels of membership and home clan channels.

If Warcraft III meets the high standards that Blizzard have set for their past titles, this could, dare we say, be the biggest game of the year, picking up the RTS faithful where Starcraft leaves off. Blizzard's Day of Judgment approaches. Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos is scheduled for release the second half of 2002.

John Dewhurst

Bill Roper, Vice President of Blizzard North, spoke to us about all things Warcraft and some things Blizzard: past, present and future.

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How have past Blizzard games affected your approach to Warcraft III?

We have taken great care in looking at our successes with StarCraft and building from them. Having the races in the game provide different play experiences was a key factor we transitioned into Warcraft III. While the Orcs and Humans will provide a comfortable launching point for any Real Time Strategy player, the Night Elves and the Undead provide some great twists to the usual way people play. We have also learned a great deal about what types of games and maps people like to play in over Battle.net and we have spent lots of time planning out some new features for our Warcraft III community to better support Ladders, Tournaments and Clans.

For each of the four races how much room is there to formulate your own tactics? Have you designed them to play exclusively in certain ways to differentiate them or will similar tactics be useful across the board?

While some of the most basic strategies will be applicable across all four races, the vast majority of the strategies involved in the game come from the uniqueness of the races and the units in their command. It is through the use of the specific abilities of not only the Legendary Heroes but also the basic units that make each race a very different play experience.

With Worlds of Warcraft in the works, is one of the goals of Warcraft III to establish a definite universe and mythology for the future?

Yes. We specifically set the beginning of World of Warcraft 4 years after the end of Warcraft III to create and maintain a strong continuity within the world. We want both games to stand on their own, while at the same time be great companion pieces. The Warcraft universe is going to greatly increase in scope with Warcraft III and we intend to continue to nurture and grow it with World of Warcraft.

What can we expect from the soundtrack?

We focus on having a really good score that layers on top of that sound effects in character interactions to convey what's happening. Whether it's units having specific responses to you, to specific commands, using specific spells, to being created in the first place, to dying, we do it an awful lot with music, sound and visual effects.

And when a hero dies - we want it to be a really big thing since you've built him up. When he dies, we want you to know, we want everyone to know. We've come up with some really clever ways using to visual and aural sensations to get across the fact that a major event has occurred.

Beyond Worlds of Warcraft, what is the future for Blizzard strategy titles?

To be honest, we're not really working on any new strategy titles right now. I think that after Warcraft III is done, we'll look at the next thing we want to do. Is that going to be a strategy game? I don't know. I would say that whatever it is, we're not going to be content just to redo something as before. Every time we do a new game, we try to have a combination of elements. We want to introduce something very new. We haven't ever sat down and decided on a specific direction for our strategy games.

Warcraft 3D

Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos marks Blizzard's move into full 3D, with an engine supporting D3D and OpenGL APIs and most resolutions in the 4:3 ratio (that means 1024x768 and higher). This is a long way from the 640x480 debacle of Diablo II in late 2000.

The effect on the game looks to be marginal, since the camera will be fixed with no rotation possible and the maximum zoom out will be fairly low, to keep the focus on the small group tactics. There has been talk of some spells affecting the camera position.

The DEATH of Genres

We all know about the explosive birth of relatively new genres like real-time strategy games or first-person shooters but what about the genres which have faded to make way for the new? Timothy C. Best digs out a black armband and delves into genre mortality.

Y ou just hammered everything perfectly into place. All of your gear is colour-coded, numbered, cross-catalogued and neatly shelved. You've reached this blissful state of control. Then the same thing happens every time. Like a herd of buffaloes, who have watched Animal House one too many times, change will gallop through and use your colour-coded tabs for naked twister and your shelving for an impromptu white water raft (in what used to be your living room). Computers have a lot to answer for in the change stakes. It's almost like the frat-oxen of

change logged on right away and started to use PC's time-saving advantages from the get-go. Numbers are crunched at the speed of electricity; research zaps into overdrive and fans have access to fake Star Wars trailers at a speed that suggests Einstein was just making up the light barrier stuff.

In this mercurial world it's craziness to think that gaming is going to be untouched. No matter how much we liked Bad Dude Vs. Dragon Ninja, we will never see a game just like it again. Even Zork sold out and got graphics.

Change leads to great new shinys but also has the flip side of throwing the old into metaphorical recycling bags for an early Monday pick-up. Come with us as we explore the genres which have gone towards the light as well as the ones that look like they have life yet, but really are just doppelgangers, fetches and shades of their former selves.
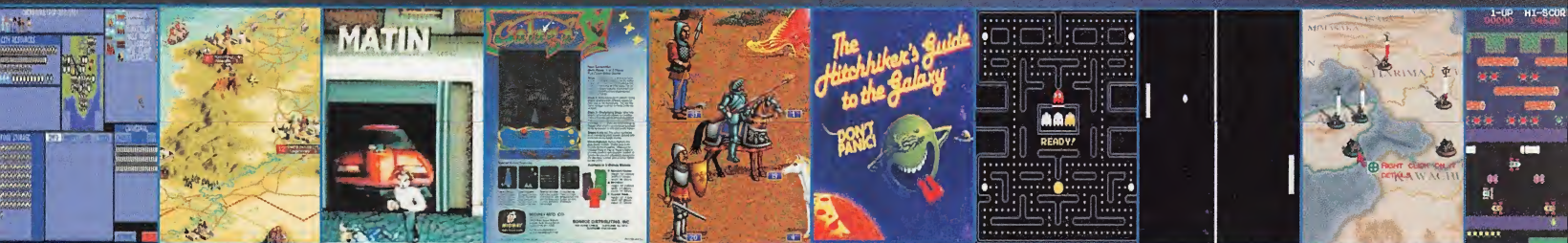
#1 The Proto Genres

In the party of the Deceased:
Pong, Pacman, Frogger, Space Invaders, R-Type, Galaga, Double Dragon, Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy
Epitaph: The good old days, when men were men and games were basic.

These games came from a simpler time. A world where the Goodies had never known the TV repeat and the Cure were a new band.

These were the earliest of games. They are grouped together because they were all a product of severe hardware limitations. I'm talking text adventures, I'm talking games with a single screen per level like Frogger, I'm talking side-scrollers (or top-scrollers) like R-Type or Galaga.

We loved the humble side scroller. They had the huge advantage that your brain didn't have to worry about working out the perspective in 3D graphics or thinking about obscure clues ... all you had to do is fast-twitch up and down and pound the fire button.

Generally, nowadays, these games only have

their rest interrupted by console developers looking to recapture those golden days of pimply youth in arcades. Today we say goodbye ... rest well.

#2 Platform Games

In the party of the Deceased:
Super Mario Brothers (Nintendo), Commander Keen, Abe's Oddysee, Prince of Persia, Halloween Harry
Epitaph: We ran, we jumped. We jumped well. You will be fondly remembered.

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their rest interrupted by console developers looking to recapture those golden days of pimply youth in arcades. Today we say goodbye ... rest well.

CONVERGENCE: THE DEATH OF GENRES

Once, mighty genres strode the Earth. They were larger than life and more proud than a rising Hollywood star. LucasArts and Sierra generated the Adventure Titan. id created the FPS monster. When we wrote reviews we used to have a nice category for genre. We used to choose between a few neat options like sports, sim, racing, first-person shooter, RPG or adventure.

Now everything is starting to get blurry. Games are becoming FPS/sport/sim/RPGs like Speedball Arena, action/RPG/FPS/adventures like Deus Ex or sim/strategy/adventure/action

game like Republic.

Technology is letting developers do more. There are enough CPU cycles to run complex AIs, handle extensive geometry and delicate collision detection. Now you can make puzzles more complex. You can make sure that, like in real life, you can solve problems in several ways. The more realistic a game, the more options it gives us and the more genres blur.

Marketing people can't help but encourage this. For one, it means they can aim at a wider demographic. Beyond that, anything that adds a pretty 3D element (making for great promo screen shots) can't be a bad thing.

As the genres blur, the games that emerge define new hybrid genres, like tactical combat or command and control or City Mega-ultra-overlord. Old genres never disappear; they just learn some new tricks, get some new dancing monkeys, add a new dash of paint to their wagons and re-open the show under a new name.

#3 Adventure Games

In the party of the Deceased:
Day of the Tentacle, Leisure Suit Larry, Curse of Monkey Island, Grim Fandango
Epitaph: Pointing and clicking showed us so much. We will remember the laughs and mystery; the thrills and, of course, the frustration of missing the magic marker on screen four.

People have been claiming the death of adventure games for years now, but they have always just held on. Developers, reared on LucasArts games, have felt compelled to release a little something and just keep things rocketing along a little above flatline.

There was Grim Fandango a couple of years ago and more recently, the Longest Journey. People keep citing this game here and that game there as keeping the flame burning but really ... when was the last Sam and Max, Leisure Suit Larry or Grim Fandango?

Wandering around a world has become more than just clicking on 2D objects and throwing them into a inventory to be used in some obscure puzzle 75 screens later.

Obviously, there is more to the adventure genre than that but all of the elements of story, puzzles and mystery have now been absorbed into games of other genres, creating worlds that are more dynamic than the usually purely cerebral worlds of adventure games. The notion of a place of limited interactivity is quickly becoming outmoded. People want to take part in the action, not just learn about it or wait to type in the right command and then watch their hero swing into action.

Beloved adventure games, rest in peace knowing that your legacy lives on in those genres which survive you.

#4 Single-Player FPS

In the party of the Deceased:
Doom, Quake, Half-Life
Epitaph: Eventually the ammo does run out.

Single-player first person shooter games really reached a high water mark with Half-Life. There were plenty before and there have been plenty since but few have had the same impact. Since then all of the major FPS action has been online and team-based.

The big titles have been Tribes 2, Unreal Tournament, Quake III and Counter Strike. Even Return to Castle Wolfenstien has been lauded for its multi-player game while only mild applause has been heard for the single player game. Max Payne was a shooter with a compelling, if a little short, single-player game. Bullet time added a much-needed breath of fresh air ... but then again so did the fact that it was third person and not first person.

There have also been impressive single player first-person shooter outings in the form of No One Lives Forever and Serious Sam, but both games rely steadily on the humour of the piss take. They are fun and silly, but hardly enough to start any new trends or to re-vitalise the genre.

Deus Ex managed to take the shooter format to the next level but in doing so it borrowed so heavily from adventure and RPG games it could hardly be considered anything but a beautiful mutant and not a pure FPS. Other games of the FPS kin have also drawn in other gameplay elements to break the point and blast monotony. Games like Red Faction and Halo have gone down the vehicle path, adding serious sim elements.

There are only so many combinations of shoot-shoot-shoot-get-the-red-key-collect -the-energy-

pack games that can be produced and a host of Quake clones didn't help. Beyond that the 3D graphics explosion often pushed games towards spectacular explosions and away from spectacular gameplay. Hoards of rushing monsters gave way to a select few monsters who gloriously showed off all of the 3D rendering power and particle effects of the latest RayForce Virtual Voodoo card. As the graphics got better people wondered why other elements like the AI didn't advance, as quickly, and after Half-Life it wasn't enough just to have madly rushing zombies. Once the homicidal monsters were removed then everything had to have an explanation and FPS games moved from FPS to action/adventure.

#5 Turn-based Strategy Games

In the party of the Deceased:
Civilization (all versions), Master of Orion II, Risk, Heroes of Might and Magic
Epitaph: You always knew one good turn deserved another.

What has Turn-based strategy got left? Well, Civ. That's about it. Even the most recent version of the game was little more than taking Civ II and adding in some elements from Alpha Centauri and expanding cultural effects. Civ manages such a feat through tight design and, more importantly, an unmatched pedigree. No other real paragons of turn-by-turn action are stepping up or causing much of a buzz. Look in the sales charts and the most wanted lists.

Several basic problems have lead to turn-based gaming's incompatibility with the modern world. For one, they don't tend to look as spectacular as their real-time brethren: watching demos of a guy

clicking the "turn" button rocks very few worlds, nor is the slow, thoughtful, approach easy to market.

Then you have the problems with the AI. Even great game intelligences have problems working long-term and understanding and countering complex human strategies. They get around it by having the computer "cheat" by bouncing up their resources and generating replacement troops, which can take the edge off your brilliant strategies. Most people have turned to playing other people online to get around this.

This is fine for real-time strategy games but presents real problems for turn-based games. The biggest issue being the fact that even if you all take

your turn at the same time, before any results can be calculated you have to wait for the slowest player to make all of their choices. This could make each turn last for up to 10 minutes against players sporting extreme pedant tendencies. If you apply a time limit then you sacrifice the thoughtful nature of the game that defines turn-based playing.

To counter these issues many games are starting to cleverly combine elements of RTS with turn-based sensibilities, like the brilliant Shogun (turn-based kingdom management and RTS combat), Jagged Alliance as well as the upcoming X-Com: Freedom Ridge and Master of Orion III games.

Let Us Pray...

Good games die. Happily, some of those games get together with other games, produce offspring and settle down to a good couple of years before they're nothing but memories. Games fans that lose a loved one are then compelled to change and embrace new joys, which they may or may not do. Some would simply prefer to live in the past.

Long live the memories of the mighty, the original and the pioneers. One day all the game of today will be dust, as well...

Timothy C. Best

CONVERGENCE IN ACTION

Lets take a look into our list of our reader's most wanted games. Beautiful mutant hybrids abound. Here's just the a few of them:
Warcraft III: an RTS game borrowing so many RPG elements that Blizzard has started calling it an RPS or role-playing strategy.
Neverwinter Nights: Although Neverwinter has an extensive single-player game; it's real reason for being is giving a human dungeon master control of a game for a group of human players. In short, it's a 3D multi-player strategic/RPG/adventure.
GTA 3: Action/adventure/vehicle/crime game. Run, shoot, steal; take on crime missions and generally cause mayhem all in lovely 3D.
Motor City Online: A massively multiplayer online

game where players start with a basic car and have to slowly build up automotive hardware and street cred, pitting your racing skills against other human players. The buying, selling, car building (as opposed to character building) and creating a rep all are heavily RPG based. This is probably the most generically "pure" of the most anticipated games.
Jedi Knight 2: A third person action/adventure game, combining a continuing story with a 3D fighting game with complex mutli-hit combos and power moves but drawing on many FPS conventions and level design.
Dungeon Siege: just your basic 3D Action/strategy/RPG fantasy romp.

After much debate, heartache and yes, tears, the Score List is back. Only one page this month, but we have grand plans, oh yes. Here you can look back fondly at all the games PowerPlay has reviewed over the past two years and remember the greats and the not-so-greats. What's that? Lists don't interest you unless you can win a prize? Well stay tuned for next month's scorelist...

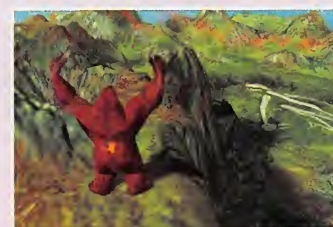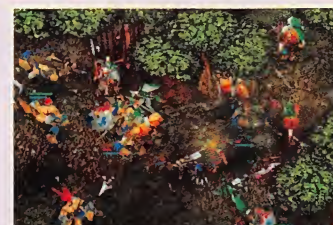| Game	Issue	Score
Abomination: The Nemesis Project	'44	81%
Fox Sports NBA 2000	'44	56%
Freespace 2	'44	95%
Gabriel Knight 3	'44	87%
Grand Theft Auto 2	'44	84%
Independence War: Defiance Sp Ed	'44	72%
Jane's USAF	'44	86%
Links 2000	'44	79%
Madden 2000	'44	84%
Microsoft Flight Simulator 2000	'44	84%
Nascar 3	'44	89%
Nations: Fighter Command	'44	82%
Omikron: The Nomad Soul	'44	93%
Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear	'44	92%
Seven Kingdoms 2	'44	82%
Shadow Company: Left For Dead	'44	74%
SU-27 Flanker 2.0	'44	83%
Traitor's Gate	'44	78%
FIFA 2000	'45	88%
Gulf War: Operation Desert Hammer	'45	55%
Half-Life: Opposing Force	'45	90%
Indiana Jones and the Infernal Machine	'45	69%
M25 Racer	'45	25%
NBA Live 2000	'45	90%
Pharoah	'45	88%
Quake III Arena	'45	93%
Rally Championship	'45	88%
Rayman 2	'45	89%
Revenant	'45	82%
Rollercoaster Tycoon	'45	81%
Alpha Centauri:Alien Crossfire	'45	83%
The Wheel of Time	'45	84%
Theme Park World	'45	80%
Thief Gold	'45	96%
Ultima IX: Ascension	'45	70%
Unreal Tournament	'45	94%
12 o'Clock High	'46	68%
Age of Wonders	'46	84%
Codename: Eagle	'46	64%
Delta Force 2	'46	78%
Dick Johnson V8 Challenge	'46	45%
H&D: Fight For Freedom	'46	45%
Imperium Galactica 2	'46	92%
NBA Inside Drive 2000	'46	68%
Nerf Arena	'46	70%
NHL Championship2000	'46	78%
Nocturne	'46	79%
Panzer Elite	'46	85%
Phoenix	'46	64%
Planescape: Torment	'46	91%
Puma Street Soccer	'46	75%
Spec Ops 2: Green Beret	'46	60%
Star Trek: Hidden Evil	'46	69%
Swat 3: Close Quarters Combat	'46	90%
Urban Chaos	'46	85%
Akuma: Demonspawn	'47	50%
Descent 3: Mercenaries	'47	65%
Dracula	'47	58%
F/A 18 Hornet	'47	91%
Final Fantasy VIII	'47	77%
Gorky 17	'47	65%
Interstate 82	'47	60%
Pandora's Box	'47	68%
Septerra Core	'47	84%
The Sims	'47	90%
Slave Zero	'47	55%
South Park Rally	'47	41%
Speed Demons	'47	55%
Airport Inc.	'48	42%
Army Men: In Space	'48	66%
Battlezone 2: Combat Commander	'48	85%
Croc 2	'48	78%
Ford Racing	'48	72%
Invictus: The Shadow of Olympus	'48	51%
KA-52 Alligator	'48	65%
Messiah	'48	89%
Nascar Revolution	'48	35%
Nox	'48	83%
Rising Sun	'48	82%
Ultima Online: Discovery Edition	'48	68%
World Manager 2000	'48	34%
Beetle Crazy Cup	'48	74%
Grand Prix World	'49	83%
Majesty	'49	79%
Might and Magic 8	'49	55%
Shadow Watch	'49	65%
Soldier of Fortune	'49	86%
Star Trek: Armada	'49	56%
Star Wars: Force Commander	'49	58%
Starlancer	'49	93%
Superbike 2000	'49	89%
Theocracy	'49	76%
Thief II: The Metal Age	'49	95%
Tiger Woods USA Grand Tour 2000	'49	84%
Allegiance	'50	81%
Army Men: Air Tactics	'50	65%
Asheron's Call	'50	88%
Atlantis II	'50	78%
Battlecruiser 3000	'50	72%
Crusaders of Might and Magic	'50	75%
Enemy Engaged	'50	91%
Evolva	'50	71%
Gunship	'50	89%
Martian Gothic	'50	51%
Millennium Racer	'50	70%
Rollcage II	'50	80%
Shogun: Total War	'50	92%
Cricket 2000	'51	70%
Dark Reign 2	'51	89%
Deus Ex	'51	98%
Dogs of War	'51	81%
Flying Heroes	'51	76%
Lemmings Revolution	'51	70%
Motocross Madness 2	'51	85%
Soulbringer	'51	80%
UEFA Manager 2000	'51	79%
Wild Wild West: The Steel Assassin	'51	61%
Alien Nations	'52	75%
Daikatana	'52	64%
Grand Prix Legends	'52	95%
Ground Control	'52	90%
Icewind Dale	'52	80%
King of Dragon Pass	'52	31%
Maximum Flight	'52	78%
MDK 2	'52	84%
Need for Speed: Porsche 2000	'52	75%
Sydney 2000	'52	85%
Vampire: The Masquerade	'52	82%
Baldur's Gate II	'52	93%
Diablo 2	'52	89%
Dino Crisis	'52	68%
Earth 2150	'52	91%
Grand Prix 3	'52	88%
Klingon Academy	'53	83%
Metal Fatigue	'53	76%
Wartorn	'53	78%
Age of Empires 2: The Conquerors	'54	90%
All Star Tennis 2000	'54	62%
Arcatera	'54	49%
F/A-18E Super Hornet	'54	63%
Heavy Metal: FAKK 2	'54	80%
Kiss Psycho Circus	'54	64%
Mech Collection	'54	69%
Midtown Madness	'54	82%
Pizza Syndicate	'54	52%
Reach for the Stars	'54	79%
The Sims: Livin' Large	'54	88%
Tachyon: The Fringe	'54	84%
Thandor	'54	69%
Wacky Races	'54	32%
Wargames Heaven	'54	81%
Warlords Battlecry	'54	62%
Crimson Skies	'55	89%
Dirt Track Racing	'55	90%
Escape from Monkey Island	'55	90%
Half-Life: Counter-Strike	'55	91%
Homeworld: Cataclysm	'55	90%
MTV Skateboarding	'55	65%
Rugby 2001	'55	80%
Sacrifice	'55	90%
Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force	'55	86%
V-Rally 2	'55	81%
1nsane	'56	87%
Buck & Bass 2	'56	11%
Carmageddon 2000	'56	40%
Combat Mission: Beyond Overlord	'56	90%
Cultures	'56	81%
Hitman: Codename 47	'56	90%
In Cold Blood	'56	80%
Infestation	'56	68%
Madden 2001	'56	78%
No One Lives Forever	'56	90%
Professional Bull Rider 2	'56	36%
Red Alert 2	'56	91%
Rune	'56	80%
Star Trek: New Worlds	'56	35%
Starship Troopers	'56	76%
Submarine Titans	'56	70%
Tomb Raider Chronicles	'56	71%
Ultra Pinball Thrillride	'56	71%
B-17 2: The Mighty Eighth	'57	90%
Bass Avenger	'57	8%
Championship Manager 00/01	'57	90%
Colin McRae Rally 2	'57	85%
Combat Flight Sim 2	'57	83%
Deep Fighter	'57	60%
FIFA 2001	'57	84%
Gunman Chronicles	'57	80%
Heroes Chronicles	'57	68%
Links 2001	'57	82%
Mechwarrior 4: Vengeance	'57	91%
Mercedes Benz Truck Racing	'57	55%
Metal Gear Solid	'57	78%
Pacman	'57	70%
Project IGI	'57	86%
Stupid Invaders	'57	85%
Tiger Woods USA Tour	'57	59%
Alice	'58	83%
Battle Isle: Andosia War	'58	76%
Call to Power II	'58	78%
Close Combat: Invasion	'58	85%
Delta Force: Land Warrior	'58	75%
F1 Season 2000	'58	67%
Fur Fighters	'58	73%
Galaga	'58	64%
Giants: Citizen Kabuto	'58	86%
Kiss Pinball	'58	22%
Oni	'58	88%
Panzer General 3	'58	72%
Quake 3: Team Arena	'58	57%
Rainbow 6: Covert Ops	'58	69%
Resident Evil 3	'58	63%
Screamer 4x4	'58	59%
Sheep	'58	70%
Tony Hawk Pro Skater 2	'58	92%
X-Gold	'58	65%
Zeus	'58	91%
Battle of Britain	'59	90%
Blair Witch Project: Coffin Rock	'59	62%
Blair Witch Project: Elly Kedward	'59	74%
Blair Witch Project: Rustin Parr	'59	85%
Chicken Run	'59	69%
Dirt Track Racing: Sprint Cars	'59	87%
Everquest Scars of Velious	'59	85%
PGA Golf Titanium	'59	86%
Pro Rally 2001	'59	68%
Severance Blade of Darkness	'59	80%
Sim Coaster	'59	79%

Here's your second of four chances to vote in this year's prestigious PCPP Reader Game of the Year awards. But we don't just expect you to vote out of the goodness of your heart! Every correctly filled in voting form we receive (that means 10 eligible games, a reason for your Game of the Year and, naturally, your full name and postal address) will go into the draw to win this fantastic 22" Mitsubishi monitor. It's massive! It's phat! As we said in last month's review, gaming just doesn't get any bigger, without expensive projectors and white sheets hung on the wall. And it's all thanks to the generous folks at Mitsubishi Electric Australia!

Game	Year	Score	Game	Year	Score	Game	Year	Score
Starfleet Command 2	'59	55%	Heist	'62	7%	Max Payne	'65	84%
Age of Sail 2	'60	70%	Myst III Exile	'62	81%	Original War	'65	74%
Battle for Naboo	'60	25%	Settlers IV	'62	65%	Sudden Strike Forever	'65	88%
Black & White	'60	92%	Worms World Party	'62	90%	Conquest: Frontier Wars	'66	85%
Clive Barker's Undying	'60	83%	Alone in the Dark 4	'63	69%	International Cricket Captain	'66	71%
Evil Islands	'60	79%	Conflict Zone	'63	84%	The Nations	'66	70%
F1 Racing Championship	'60	90%	Diablo II: Lord of Destruction	'63	90%	Pool of Radiance 2	'66	79%
Kingdom Under Fire	'60	78%	Emperor: Battle for Dune	'63	79%	Schizm	'66	55%
NASCAR 4	'60	93%	Gunlok	'63	81%	Shogun: Total War Warlord Edition	'66	86%
NBA Live 2001	'60	81%	I-War 2: Edge of Chaos	'63	85%	The Sting	'66	73%
Serious Sam	'60	81%	The Moon Project	'63	87%	Commandos 2: Men of Courage	'67	91%
Sudden Strike	'60	92%	Outlive	'63	56%	Divided Ground	'67	75%
Tribes 2	'60	93%	Space Tripper	'63	86%	Dragon Riders of Pern	'67	60%
Airfix: Dogfighter	'61	79%	Startopia	'63	88%	FA Premier League Manager 2002	'67	70%
Crime Cities	'61	52%	Stunt GP	'63	73%	Heroes Chronicles - The Final Chapters	'67	65%
Fallout Tactics: Brotherhood of Steel	'61	85%	Train Simulator	'63	59%	Monopoly Tycoon	'67	75%
Fate of the Dragon	'61	67%	X-Com Enforcer	'63	71%	Project Eden	'67	80%
Hostile Waters	'61	91%	Z: Steel Soldiers	'63	86%	Red Alert 2: Yuri's Revenge	'67	88%
Icewind Dale: Heart of Winter	'61	70%	Arcanum	'63	92%	Red Faction	'67	81%
Jagged Alliance 2: Unfinished Business	'61	83%	Elite Force Expansion	'63	30%	Throne of Darkness	'67	91%
Jetfighter 4	'61	75%	Gangsters 2: Vendetta	'63	51%	Anarchy Online	'68	86%
Mission Humanity	'61	7%	Half-Life Blue Shift	'64	78%	Civilization III	'68	95%
Nicktoons Racing	'61	71%	Leadfoot	'64	80%	Empire Earth	'68	89%
The Sims: House Party	'61	80%	Mechcommander 2	'64	84%	Evil Twin	'68	70%
Star Trek: Away Team	'61	75%	Merchant Prince 2	'64	42%	Links Championship Edition	'68	84%
Summoner	'61	90%	Offroad Redneck Racing	'64	57%	Madden 2002	'68	78%
Ultima Online: Third Dawn	'61	66%	Operation Flashpoint	'64	94%	NHL 2002	'68	82%
The Ward	'61	59%	Tropico	'64	71%	Spiderman	'68	67%
Cossacks	'62	79%	Anachronox	'65	85%	Stronghold	'68	93%
Deep Space 9: The Fallen	'62	84%	Baldur's Gate II: Throne of Bhaal	'65	89%	Sub Command	'68	65%
Desperados	'62	86%	Eurofighter Typhoon	'65	55%	The Longest Journey	'68	88%
F1 World GP 2000	'62	78%	Fly! II	'65	71%	WW3 Black Gold	'68	79%
Freedom: 1st Resistance	'62	64%	Legends of Might & Magic	'65	40%	Zax: The Alien Hunter	'68	72%

BEST GAME OF 2001

1. ....

Why is this the game of the year? ....
....
....
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2. ....
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10. ....

YOUR DETAILS

Name: ....

Address: ....
....
                              Postcode: ....

State: ....   Country: ....

HOW TO VOTE

Simply write your favourite game of 2001 in the top space and then provide a brief reason for why you believe this should be game of the year. Then fill in the rest of the positions with other worthy 2001 releases and send the whole caboodle to:

PC PowerPlay
GOTY Primaries
78 Renwick St
Redfern 2016

games in review

Count 'em: 6 titles derivative titles in Reviews this month. (That's assuming you're not a miserable bastard who thinks nothing's been new since Ultima Underworld) This derivativeness (sic) ranges from the return of familiar names and situations to duplications of previous outings. One of the six continues an established series in a new form, there are two sequels (one to an old series, one to a game we've barely become accustomed to), one stand alone mission pack masquerading as a sequel and two add-on expansions to recent favourites. That's an awful lot of games with minimal fresh, new content.

The big winner of this bunch is Renegade which manages to present first person action with a plausible strategy element, all the while maintaining Westwood's tradition of producing the most easily digested games on the market... but I won't spoil any more of the review. Suffice to say C&C: Renegade is not the dog that certain reports from E3 2001 seemed to suggest. That's a good thing.

Before I get too carried away with this whole "Give me something new and it'll be the greatest" angle, the two newest games in the newest field of modern gaming DAoC and WWII Online are also amongst the lowest in score, with the latter receiving something of a pillorying. Has online gaming been birthing since UO? Maybe so.

Sadly, this whole array of games failed to ignite the PCPP Crack Review Squad to screams of unbridled passion and so we are without a Gold Award this month. Remember that a score of 90% is not something we give likely, and perfectly good ways to spend your precious leisure time can certainly be found in the pages that follow. Now is the time to indulge in one's own personal gaming passions, make your own way through if you will.

Allow me to conclude by offering a conundrum. Here are three statements:

1. Serious Sam: The Second Encounter is indeed NOT Serious Sam 2 (refer to first paragraph) but is a damn good laugh nonetheless.
2. Europa Universalis II is INDEED the fastest sequel to ever reach our shores.
3. Pepsi Max Extreme Sports indeed DOES come with a free can of Pepsi - just bug your retailer until he gives you one.

One of the previous statements is not true. Dare you demand a can of Pepsi from your local retailer?

John Dewhurst
johnd@next.com.au

90+	Gold Award. A classic, everyone will love this game.
89-80	A strong title that's hard to fault. But perhaps not the best in its field.
79-60	Competent and playable. For fans of the genre.
59-40	Decidedly average, probably boring.
39-0	A dog. Bad, shamelessly unoriginal, cheap and horrible. Avoid.

C & C: Renegade

The War On Terror finds a new ally...

Sakura: Femme fatale

Our little digger, Major Havoc

The Brotherhood of Nod would have to pay

"Ten-Four, little buddy"

Westwood games are like a dependable brand of fast food: never amazing, never awful, but for the Westwood connoisseur, consistently palatable. Command & Conquer has primarily been a real time strategy product, occasionally flirting with time travel (Red Alert) and voxel graphics (Tiberian Sun). C&C Renegade presents a diversion into two fashionable game genres of late: dynamic first/third person action, and online multi-player bloodbath. By playing through the eyes of a GDI soldier, the result is a refreshing take on one of the oldest and silliest PC gaming franchises.

Military intelligence

As in most generic RTS games, the soldiers in the original Command & Conquer were pretty stupid. When left unattended, they would just stand around, maybe doing the odd push-up, but were essentially inert. They had a nasty habit of sitting and taking any pummelling that came from outside their range, and would nobly attempt to clog up the treads of oncoming tanks with their pulverised guts. They weren't that bright in the pathing arena, either. They could be counted on to automatically group themselves into little "X"

patterns, and that was all. More expensive troopers were just a standard dumb grunt with a better weapon. Understandable for soldiers with only a few seconds of basic training, but frustrating regardless.

Enter the Commando. This special unit had the same weaknesses and speed as a standard trooper, but he was much deadlier. He could plant C4 to destroy any enemy building in a single blast, and his sniper rifle could take out any man in a single shot. He also had an attitude, reflected in his gruff, overconfident sound bytes. While hearing "That was left-handed" for the 20th time was a little grating, he added a whole new dimension to the game. Instead of sending in waves of cannon fodder, one took control in a level that more resembled the highly tactical Commandos 2.

The commando unit has been such a success that he's been mimicked in every Westwood game since, each time becoming a welcome avatar for the player's destructive fantasies. Ever the populists, Westwood has made its latest game a celebration of the

commando, putting you in his shoes from go to whoa. While the single player campaign game is a standard good versus evil conflagration, the multiplayer options are more involved, allowing one to play any conceivable battlefield role in the forces of either the Global Defence Initiative or the Brotherhood of Nod. The campaign refines an existing genre, while the multiplayer game expands another into exciting new territory.

"...the result is a refreshing take on one of the oldest and silliest PC gaming franchises"

It's quiet...

The single player game is rock solid, just like its protagonist, Major Havoc. Havoc is the archetypal 80s action point man, and while he doesn't indulge any disgusting personal habits like chewing tobacco, one does not doubt for a second that he's a sexual tyrannosaurus. Sporting a crew cut, a complete set of official GDI merchandise (coming soon to a Mooks near you), and a bad attitude, he's ready to rock the third world. Not with airlifts of bibles or the Green Left Weekly, but with one-liners

Havoc takes a tank

The Ion Cannon Beam.. get back man!

Protecting base structures is pivotal to success... so is destroying the enemy's

The cavalry arrives to pat Havoc on the back

NO MORE NATO?

As part of its insane new military buildup, the US has been neglecting long standing partnerships like NATO and the UN. Without backing from the greatest nation on Earth, these institutions are certainly doomed to failure perhaps to be replaced by a more arse-kicking Global Defence Initiative. We can only hope.

and hot lead. In the continued absence of Duke Nukem Forever, he's the best value white male power fantasy on the market.

GDI is, of course, an all-inclusive strike force representing the few respectable nations of the world. Equally egalitarian is NOD, with their ranks swelling from the "lowest of places." The opening cinematics reveal the boss dudes you'll face later in the game, a comical rogue gallery that only Westwood's fine FMV sensitivities could do justice. Ruthless

Columbian terrorist Mendoza, Japanese killer babe Sakura, and the diminutive General Rackenshaw, nicknamed mini-me by an anonymous PCPP staffer. The good guys have equally diverse ranks, populated with a good majority of young women in tight fitting uniforms.

...Too quiet!

It's immediately obvious that the entire game environment has been modelled closely on the map elements of the original C&C. Strolling through a base, one soon sees that even a normal sized power station is enormous when compared to the human scale. The dividing walls in the top-down RTS become cavernous ravines, and the crazy architecture finally begins to make sense. When you looked down at the preposterous Hand of Nod barracks structure, it was a very silly thing, but when you look up at its tower, a giant hand squeezing a blood red globe, its power and purpose are overwhelming.

As one mere mortal in this large and unforgiving game world, things seem stacked against you at first, but that's just the way Havoc likes it as long as he's heavily armed. The row of number keys selects from the available weapons, as is custom, and the ballistic range

is most impressive. Weakest is the silenced pistol, but most weapons are far more damaging and versatile. There are sniper rifles, flame-throwers, assault rifles and various explosives. The sniper scope only enlarges the view a little, and negates most of this benefit with green screen cyber-bollocks, but it's a great weapon regardless. As are the rocket launcher, it's just the thing for marauding enemy air support.

Demolition man

Explosive charges play a powerful role, offering the same versatility and satisfaction of Duke's old pipe bombs. More powerful than standard C4 is the Ion Cannon Beacon, which can call in a strike from one of GDI's space based laser satellites. To think of all the criticism that missile defence gets these days, when it's so obviously essential to the War On Terror. Again, the personal scale makes this super weapon from the original game seem a lot more of a killer death ray. The entire sky lights up, and bands of concentric blue light pulse as if to make the Earth itself shudder under its wrath. More so than with the C4, it's a good idea to clear the scene of the crime after setting one.

All of these weapons are satisfying, and empowering, but nothing beats the thrill of

Check it out Ladies... nothing but prime beef

"Don't make me shoot you"

Tiberium is deadly to even the boldest hero

"From sea to shining sea..."

getting behind the wheel of some vehicular hardware from the C&C universe. Simply approach a Hummer, look for the little green triangles that in the semiotics of the C&C universe mean "you can go inside this thing," press E, and you're away. The action switches from first to third person, and one is immediately playing things at a much faster pace. The mechanics start to feel less like Goldeneye, and more like Halo. (they don't sound like PC games to me... - Ed.) And with high speed and unlimited ammo, this is a very good thing.

Vehicle sequences provide a break from the methodical, paranoid world of being a lone gunman. Once inside a jeep, or better yet, a

bastards get up close and personal, tank treads make the exact same squishing sound from the original game.

Expect the impossible

Tying together the first and third person action is a hierarchy of objectives that sets out to make the battlefield as dynamic as possible. The skies overhead buzz constantly with activity, as friendly Orcas and enemy Apaches duel for the skies. Cargo planes streak overhead, dropping either enemy troopers or friendly munitions. Scripted radio chatter bursts to life, and wave after wave of suicide squads compete for your bullets. Aiming to

speaking, optional, but they always directly assist Havoc in his cause. Say some gun emplacements are preventing any GDI forces from landing on a given beachhead. Take out the turrets, and a hovercraft will arrive to give you a battle tank. Experienced, macho players may choose to forgo such rewards in favour of speed, but by and large these little sub-quests help fill the level with bite-sized rewards for a job well done. Positive reinforcement is the order of the day in Renegade, and all you have to do is work at it.

Tiberian sun- won't you come-

In the C&C continuity, Renegade begins shortly after the discovery of the mysterious alien plant Tiberium. It leeches minerals out of the surrounding soil, concentrating them into green, easily pluckable crystals. With Tiberium fields popping up all over the world, once worthless lands are now precious, and GDI and NOD forces are waging a worldwide war for control of this amazing resource. Tiberium plays a big role in Renegade, too. Not only in the single player game, where the gassy Tiberium fields sap your health as you approach, but also in multiplayer, where it dictates the entire in-game economy.

The multi-player action in Renegade is truly

> ## "...when the little red bastards get up close and personal, tank treads make the exact same squishing sound from the original game."

tank, the game will typically devolve into a shooting gallery free-for all. The power trip from driving the Mammoth tank is incredible, both in its raw power and its versatility. For oncoming vehicles, blast away with the twin cannons. For infantry, the right mouse button fires its trademark rockets, which also work great on helicopters. And when the little red

make this experience as interactive as possible, there are player-controlled factors that can make a big change on the order of battle.

Objectives are defined as primary and secondary. A handy dandy colour-coded compass keeps track of these emerging threats, listing the direction and distance to each. Secondary objectives are, strictly

The Hand of Nod

Havoc vs Armoured vehicle... guess who won

Dare I shoot this innocent pawn of a totalitarian regime?

WAR ON TERROR
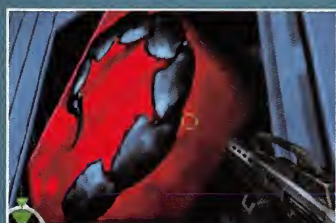
In C&C Renegade, the enemy is a sinister pack of terrorist miscreants. Sadly, you can't call someone a murderous prick to their face these days, even if they are one, so Westwood have thoughtfully devised a wholly imaginary insurgent force: The Brotherhood of Nod. The single greatest threat to world peace, they're hordes of fundamentalist... Christians? It's only a game, kids. It doesn't have to be realistic.

something else. While the typical size of a multiplayer map would be miniscule in scale of the original C&C, it's enormous when viewed through the eyes of a lone soldier. Multiplayer Renegade grants you the opportunity to take part in epic combat, where every soldier is controlled by a separate human player. This opens up greater flexibility even than in

online Wolfenstein, at a scale more on a par with WW2 Online.

Spend the points, and you can be almost any character in the C&C universe. Hero units have their own special abilities, like the use of sniper rifles, and all the other classics are in there, like grenadiers and rocket soldiers. So are all the vehicles: Light tanks, Mammoth tanks, and even the Nod Stealth tank. All units behave the same as they did at the smaller scale, so all matters of unit cost firepower and armour are already balanced. The same standard health bar that shows up as green, yellow or red is still there, another reminder that everything old is new again.

Stratego

Structures perform the same purpose as before, and are perpetually vulnerable to sneak attacks. Take out the power plant, and all other buildings work at reduced efficiency. Take out the Tiberium refinery, and their cash flow grinds to a halt. The same goes for their harvester. There are multiple roles that can be played in any engagement; the meek and inexperienced can hang back and play engineers, while the cigar-chomping gung-ho types can storm ahead.

For smaller engagements, the Renegade

engine leaves the battlefield feeling empty and under-utilised. But for large scale skirmishes, it's a dream come true. There is a huge range of weapons, characters, options and maps to choose from, and this lends a whole new dimension to the staid RTS tactics of old. The stealth tanks in particular are devastating when used judiciously. It's all good, stupid fun.

For a game that's seemingly nothing more than populist escapist bollocks, Renegade is amazingly good. For those too young to remember the very first Command & Conquer, it's an excellent introduction into the GI Joe mentality of the C&C universe. For post-modern 20-somethings, it's a delightfully cartoonish return to the follies of youth. There is doubtless a wedge of arts undergraduates in between who will find it jingoistic and offensive, but they're more likely to spend their spare time chained to trees. For the rest of us, Renegade is a backwards look at the wars of tomorrow. And it's an incredible view.

James Cottee

RATING

FOR

■ Good, stupid, violent fun
■ Deep multiplayer
■ Drive a Mammoth Tank

AGAINST

■ Game engine not the best
■ Limited single player lifespan
■ Jokes are only funny once

OVERALL

A pleasant surprise that will appeal to the inner renegade in all RTS fans

89

Comanche 4

Operation Infinite Weapons where no terrorist is safe

Firepower to knock the roof off

"Roger that"

The opening of the next IMAX featurette

Interior of the powerful warbird

I magine sitting in a machine with a ton of explosive ordinance just six feet from your jats crackers...You would need orbs of steel to pilot this bird of war! Comanche 4 is Novalogic's latest addition to their ongoing series of combat helicopter 'simulations' and this time around we are promised a "blood pumping, eye popping, action shooter in the sky" and upon completing your first mission, this is certainly not far from the truth. Let's take a closer look at what you can expect to find if you take the plunge.

Installing Comanche 4 is very straightforward and utilises an automated installation routine as we would expect. Check to ensure you have your game controller hooked up and ready to go but forget using a flight yoke, gamepad or any other controller that is not a joystick... This is a helicopter sim and you NEED a joystick. For maximum control, you will require one with a twist grip rudder axis or a set of rudder pedals added in to the equation although you can assign any controller with a hatswitch to control collective and fantail movements. Joysticks that support force feedback are given a good workout however, you may need to strap on some serious arm protection like one of those ten pin bowling wrist guards or something similar to keep your peripheral attachments secured! The force feedback in Comanche 4 is intense to say the least. There is the option to turn it ON/OFF within the game or to lower the force intensity via the controller's own software.

Train Me to Fly

Like all warriors of the sky, you will need to undertake a training program before you are unleashed into the world to knock off the bad guys. The Comanche 4 training routine involves only one 'check-ride' flight where pilots learn the art of helicopter flight and ordinance deployment in a 'quick and dirty' practise arena. The flight begins with basic helicopter manoeuvres with an instructor blasting out instructions at a rapid pace as the chopper flies along. Talk about sensory overload! Once the Comanche helicopter controls are mastered, which is relatively simple given the flight models in use, you move on to weapons deployment, targeting and destroying stationery practice objects. Then flight training shifts to the art of stealth to ensure you are never chased by a pack of hungry SAM missiles or hairy AA fire. These skills are essential so stop making paper aeroplanes and concentrate! The final phase of pre-war training involves engaging enemy drone helicopters and moving targets. Correct use of weaponry, adequate flight manoeuvring and just a tad of combat tactics will get you through training without too many problems.

> **"...a blood pumping, eye popping, action shooter in the sky is certainly not far from the truth..."**

Bad Machines

The RAH-66 Comanche helicopter. What can I say? I would rather be sitting in one of these babies fending off the evils of the world than in a jazzed up VW Beetle shooting other jazzed up VW Beetles in Carmageddon! The Comanche was a joint project by the Boeing Defense & Space

Chopper college

Vehicle goes boom

Just like Nam all over again

Cleaning up some pesky humans

TORQUE ABOUT CONTROL

The tail rotor on helicopter aircraft is an essential component in maintaining balanced flight. When spinning, the primary rotor above the cockpit generates a force known as 'torque' in the direction of spin. Without balancing the torque effect with a tail rotor, the helicopter would spin on its Z axis and a stable heading could not be maintained. The tail rotor provides a force that opposes the effect of torque to enable balanced flight.

Group, Helicopters Division and the Sikorsky Aircraft Corporation. Back in 1991, it began to design a modern, armed scout and reconnaissance aircraft to replace the U.S. Army's current range of scout and light attack aircraft dating back to the Vietnam era. The Comanche's maiden flight was made on the 4th January, 1996. The five-bladed, bearing-less main rotor provides the power for the Comanche while the fantail rear rotor assists in eliminating torque effects. The Comanche is capable of carrying a wide variety of ordinances in many different configurations.

Weapons of Mass Destruction

So what do you get in your sample bag I hear you ask? Amongst other things, a truckload of multi-million dollar warheads! We start with the 20mm Turreted Gun System (TGS). The TGS is mounted on the front of the Comanche aircraft and is a 3-barrel cannon that is effective against infantry, small vehicles, AA placements and small amphibious craft. You will use this weapon often in Comanche 4 to clean up your enemies - once the majority of defensive targets have been taken out with your heavier ordinance or to quickly send

troops or terrorists running to call their funeral directors. Let's face it though...You are not going to be able to effectively take out large installations or heavily armoured objects with the TGS. These require much heavier weapons, and of course, you have unlimited supplies of these on hand!

Your stinger missiles are your primary weapon against airborne threats. They are more than capable of bringing down any enemy aircraft in Comanche 4, using 'fire and forget' technology driven by passive infrared sensors that lock on to the heat signature of your target. Hellfire missiles are your primary weapons against large ground targets. They too use seeking technology to attain their objective, however, you need to keep the target 'locked' on until the warhead has hit its target to gain a higher success rate when used normally.

You can use these weapons in other modes that allow you to pre-program targets with GPS and then hit them precisely from a fair distance away. Hydra rockets are smaller unguided missiles that can be loaded onto the Comanche. Due to their small size, you can load up to 24 at a time and deploy them in rapid succession for a powerful punch against softer targets.

Watch those red devils fly!

Reflections on the Nature of Water

MOUSE IN DA HOUSE

Comanche 4 can also be controlled using a mouse and keyboard for all the first person shooter drones out there that may have become accustomed to this type of control. Although not recommended, this set up can be used as an alternative in case your joystick suddenly falls victim to a herd of trampling elephants. A variety of control options can be configured via the main options menus in game but seriously, go out and buy yourself a nice force feedback joystick instead.

Artillery strikes are also possible. Simply target an area and call in a strike. Shells rain down from the sky shortly after and all you need to do in most cases is go in and clean up with Hydras and cannon rounds. Artillery strikes are only available in a select number of missions though, so rely on your own skills first!

War! We're going to War!

So you think you're an ace now huh? Let's throw you into the soup with an overload of enemy activity and see if you can bring your sardine-can back to base in good shape. It's time to suit up, hit the

groups and resolving ongoing conflicts involving terrorist regimes suppressing the 'good' citizens of the Earth. Fair enough! Definitely a realistic objective given that most modern day warfare revolves around eliminating such activities.

Operation Island Hopper is your first campaign set on the islands of South East Asia. Here you must stop a terrorist organisation called the "Manila Militia" from taking control from the existing government. Operation Rapid Response sees you called into action in 'wintery' environments to help the Belarus government fight off separatist guerillas

providing you with plenty of edge-of-your-seat action. Mission objectives are tough. First mission no problems, however, I must admit it did take 3 attempts to complete the second mission for the first campaign. Some missions I am still yet to successfully complete after a dozen attempts and this is in 'easy' mode! Comanche 4 is definitely not a walk in the park!

Operational Environments

The 3D environments are quite immersive. Water effects are a standout so too are the weapon effects such as explosive fireballs. Damage modelling is impressive, although probably not as good as IL-2 Sturmovik. 3D rendered trees, ships, buildings, towers, factories, airports you name it, it is all there.

The cockpit environment is rendered and simulated fairly well. You can see the rotors from your windows, you have all the navigational functions needed to perform each mission and various radar screens for detecting enemy units and outposts. The Multi-Function Display (MFD) coupled to the Helmet Mounted Display (HMD) provide the capabilities and feedback for visual and weapons targeting control. Views can be

Campaigns focus on eliminating terrorist groups and resolving ongoing conflicts involving regimes suppressing the 'good' citizens of the Earth

tarmac and waste a few billion dollars worth of explosives!

Comanche 4 provides a total of 6 campaigns set in 6 different regions of the world and all with their own unique setting and environmental effects, just in case the scenery gets boring after a while. Campaigns focus on eliminating terrorist

that have been disrupting travel and commerce between Belarus and Russia. Operation Crossing Guard's objective is to facilitate safe peace talks in the Balkans as you battle splinter groups through urban and city landscapes determined to put dents in the peace process and so on. Each campaign features roughly 10 missions

The Belly of the Beast

This vehicle is about to be destroyed

High above the bay trouble wasn't brewing

Someone has a world of pain heading their way

switched between 1st person, 3rd person and external views as well as fly-by viewing mode so you can battle it out from the viewpoint of your choice.

Your base is never very far away, so a quick ten minute jump back to base during a strike mission to re-arm and repair is essential in some instances. As mentioned earlier, force feedback provides the tactile component of Comanche 4. Rotor effects, weapons deployment, flare deployment, take offs and landings can all be felt with your force feedback enabled controller. When you get hammered by gunfire or AA missiles, you will definitely know about it!

One needs to question the realism of the opposition in Comanche 4. Last I heard, there were no terrorist groups around that owned fleets of modern combat helicopters and fighter jets as well as hundreds of tanks, modern military ships and cruise boats. You would think you had just gone to war with the U.S.A. the way these units seem to roll out of the production line ready to put a nail in your coffin. It reminded me a little of that old arcade game 'Gyruss'. They just keep coming from everywhere! Great for gameplay but in terms of realism it is no Top Gun.

Flight dynamics are very basic. The Comanche seems a little too light for my liking. It is too easy to spin at very high speeds and the chopper gains and loses altitude via cyclic controls a little too fast.

Come Fly with Me

As with most new games these days, a multiplayer component is included with the Comanche 4 package allowing you to play online via Novalogic's 'NovaWorld' games arena or via a LAN setup. Using NovaWorld, you can fly with up to 16 opponents at the one time and play in game types such as DeathMatch, Team DeathMatch and Co-operative modes. You can set up teams manually or automatically, assign time limits and score limits.

The included mission editor is a nice addition to further expand the game and keep you in the air before the boredom factor sets in. The editor is quite detailed and uses a drag-and-drop-style interface to build the mission environment and most details including briefings, landscapes and weather can be adjusted. It is the same editor used to build the Comanche 4 campaigns, so with a little skill and a lot of time, you can build your own complex campaigns to share with others.

I am Cheap

A small 40 page Pilot's Operating Handbook is included. For me, this just doesn't make the grade. Simply another case of profiteering at it's worst. Even more frustrating, Novalogic decided to digitise the 16 page mission builder manual in PDF format on the CD. Come on! To borrow a line from the movie Shrek, "Wake up and smell the pheromones!" The majority of gamers LOVE nice chunky printed manuals and ARE prepared to pay a little extra to get them if this is what it boils down to. For $84.95, I would like to see more in a box, than a small 40 page manual and one CD for my money. How about a nice manual with some detailed tech specs of the Comanche 4 and its weapons? Or maybe a little printed story telling to set the background for the missions? Sure the game itself is worth a penny or two but please, stop insulting our intelligence and burning our pockets!

Comanche 4 is an entirely competent action flight sim that delivers the enemies thick and fast. It's great fun and challenging which ensures its replay value.

Dean Bielanowski

Dark Age of Camelot

Brought to You by the Friendly MMORPG Glossary

Forces gather for the Raid

Many more will fall when the Winter comes...

Standing around, waiting for the War

Have at you with Golden Christmas Trees!

To some they have become an alternate life, for others an opportunity to vacation at a moment's notice and meet up with friends, colleagues and guildies to do the fantastic. We're talking Massively Multiplayer Online games and with current successful titles making large profit margins from a global customer base, gamecos the world over are jostling for a piece of the multimillion dollar revenue pie. The latest company to offer rentable characters is Mythic with their title Dark Age of Camelot (DAoC).

Online roleplaying games are large scale virtual theme parks where players team up to fight difficult monsters and enemies. Along the way you accumulate wealth and items that enhance your characters abilities to fight, cast or create items. The problem with this description is that it applies to every 3D Massively Multiplayer Online Roleplaying Game (MMORPG) currently available.

Mythic has attempted to enhance this style of battle with the introduction of controlled player vs. player combat. Realm vs. Realm (RvR) warfare has players from opposing realms battle to hold or take keeps containing valuable relics.

The world of DAoC is broken into 3 separate land masses each with their own unique race. There is Albion, home to Camelot and the human classes. Midgard is the land of Trolls, Kobolds, Dwarves and Norseman. Hibernia is the forest land of the Elves, Celts, Firbolgs and Lurikeens. Keen similarities between the three are excusable as the DAoC outdoor engine is a very professional, stable piece of code.

The hills are alive

Hills are elegantly sloped with crests and valleys that are rounded and dynamically goraud shaded based on the location of the sun in the sky. Castles are proportionally accurate and Camelot is an awesome sight whenever you need to travel there. There is very little zoning (see Glossary), certain areas need to be zoned, such as Camelot or a dungeon, but it literally takes a few seconds. You can run across the outdoor countryside from sea to sea and never once endure a "Loading, Please Wait" prompt.

The genius of the outdoor engine is the use of simple but highly effective 3D tools. For example there's just four or five different types of trees per continent but the engine can handle numerous trees on screen simultaneously. Approaching Campacorentin Forest the density of the trees dramatically increases until they form a complete canopy overhead. Entering the forest the lighting becomes darker and an expertly tweaked fog hovers on the horizon giving a visually supreme virtual experience.

Rendering distance is also further then any other MMORPG on the market with mobs

> **"Castles are proportionally accurate and Camelot is an awesome sight whenever you need to travel there.."**

(mobile objects or monsters) displayed at 80% visible distance. By comparison, Everquest only displays mobs at about 65%.

Bring Me my Cape

Character models are detailed and diverse. All characters, but women in particular, are rendered well with attractive facial features and normal bodies.

Stunningly realised player models

<insert troll with flaming bottom joke>
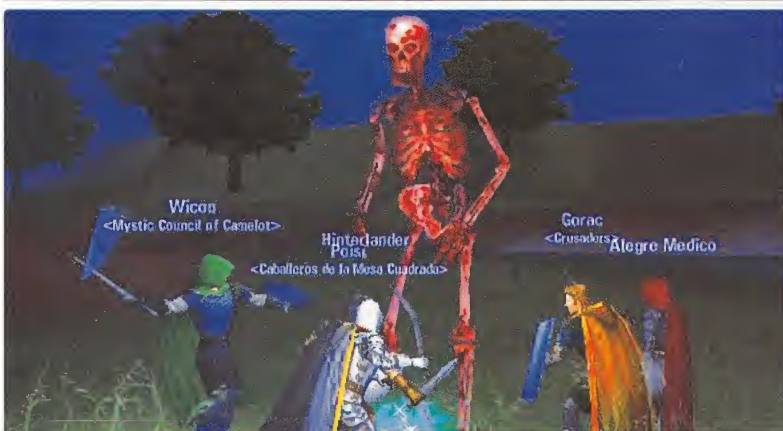
"Should I eat the blue one first, or the white one... pity I have no stomach."
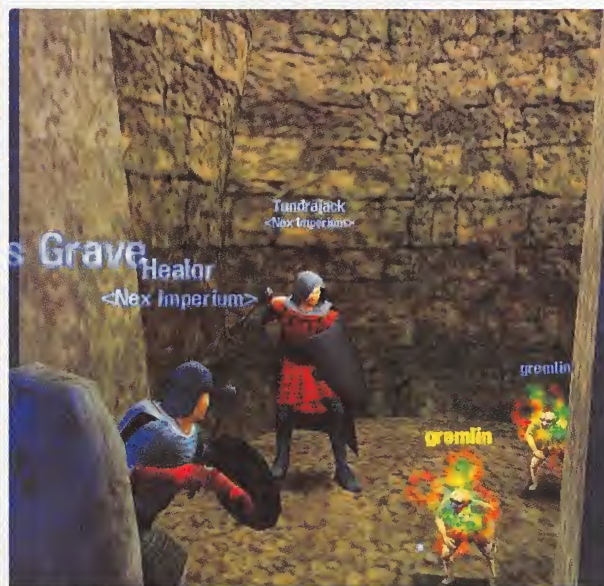
Attack the diminutions!

MMORPG GLOSSARY

Zoning: The process of de-loading the textures and objects associated with the current playfield from memory and loading those for the new area you have entered.

Mob - Mobile Objects or Enemies.

Aggro - How much the mob hates you.

Mezzing - Crowd Control function. Mobs can be frozen for a time so they can be defeated sequentially.

Nuke - A spell that does a lot of damage to an enemy

Newbie - A player new to the game

Lowbie - A low level character (under level 30)

Uber (ooo ber) - Of a high level or power. A player or item can be Uber.

BAF = Bring a friend, another term for a multiple pull.

Pull - the process of a player going out into the playfield and bringing back an appropriate level monster for the group to kill.

Add - A term used when a monster unexpectedly joins in mid fight.

Inc - Incoming used to announce a monster being pulled.

Camping - The process of leaving your group in one spot so that monsters can be pulled back to them.

Twink - A low level character with high level items.

Big thanks the Nex Imperium guild and its kind leader Luzarius for organising and taking a little lowbie cleric on a raid so our readers could see it for themselves.

Customisation adds a surprisingly fun element to the game. You can buy different coloured dyes for armour that vary in price, the lighter shades being cheaper than the dark. Fans of RPGs are big on capes and Mythic has done an extremely good job of making and animating them. For every swing or casting motion that your character makes, the cape will flow naturally.

Spell animations are the best in any MMORPG game available - the icing on the graphics cake. Casting displays appropriate animation and unique spell effects for almost all spells. Wizard nukes really look like nukes and a mob hit by a fireball will catch fire and burn with smoke billowing off it that can actually obscure vision in combat. Cleric buffs are vividly animated. Divine light shines on the buffed player, Smite has a lightning bolt coming from the sky to hit your target and cure poison uses particle 3D to make a "medical" symbol around the player that then draws out the poison as little green skulls that ascend into the air.

Tone Deafness

Sound unfortunately is nowhere near the quality of the graphics. Environmental effects are limited and often no sounds can be heard

The Blazing Lights of Heavenly Justice

Why you looking at my crew, fool?

Run! Run! My sheep are escaping!

Carcasses pile up in the epic battle

from other players. For example, when riding a horse you will hear appropriate galloping. When someone rides past you however there is only silence leaving you to ponder what kind of muffler was fitted on that horse. Dungeon noises are poor with no EAX effects or reverb to create atmosphere.

In contrast the network code in DAoC is the best in the Online gaming world. The game plots players and monsters with absolute precision - there's no lag! Players and monsters do not disappear and reappear. There's no rubber banding, no ghosting and no mysterious or random link deaths. Consider that with over 70 hours played, Dark Age of Camelot has not crashed once for me.

The network code is also extremely efficient, something us poor Telstra sods with our 3G limit have to be wary of. Basically 18 hours of play in DAoC equates to about 50mb of data or 2.7mb per hour. Modem users can also play lag free.

The Game's the Thing

Many have referred to DAoC as EQ made easy and for the most part they're right. All the races in DAoC consist of similar, standard classes. Fighters/Warriors have the most hitpoints and use melee weapons to

"tank" an enemy keeping it away from casters and clerics. Clerics are healers who keep tanks, and everyone else, alive in combat. Bards play music to charm creatures and speed up regeneration. Casters are Wizards (nukers), pet masters or mezzers. Anyone who has played Everquest over level 25 can play DAoC effortlessly - the combat is essentially that similar.

Insane Player Base

There is a problem though. The player base for DAoC contains the most number of inexperienced, incompetent and downright stupid players in any online game. Soloing is possible in DAoC but it's dull, tedious and mind numbing. Grouping is almost compulsory and that's where the inexperience of others hampers the game.

At level 5 for example I investigated the first newbie dungeon in Albion called Mithra. The incompetence I observed was astounding. Watching people zerg rush in and die is amusing for a while, until you have to group with them.

Other grouping problems exist with Mythic displaying how much experience you receive for each kill. There just seems to always be someone who says "this is too

easy, let's get something harder". What seems impossible for them to understand is that killing easier mobs fast will ultimately earn you more experience. However many just want to see experience given to them in BIG numbers. For this reason the low level player base is as much an obstacle to you levelling as the monsters that try and kill you are. The irony is that every group I was in that listened to the "experience whiner" ended up dead.

Actually it's quite easy to end up dead. People take big hits that require big heals with no real middle ground. Compounding this problem is that heal aggro on a cleric is very high. If the tank cannot do enough damage then the mob will go straight for the cleric - normally a quick death.

I see Dead People

On the positive side, Mythic is interested in keeping the game flowing smoothly. Clerics from as low as level 10 get a resurrection spell that allows people who die to be instantly resurrected back into the group. Even if a cleric is not available, players can release back to their last bind spot with all of their items but with an experience and constitution (HP) penalty. After releasing,
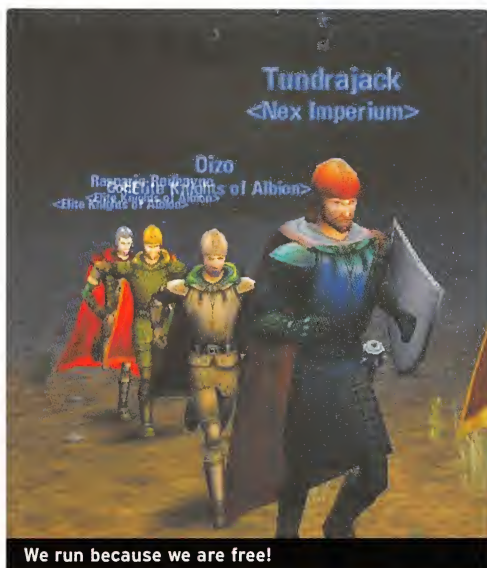
We run because we are free!

Dramatic camera angles abound, dramatically

Fearsome warriors with stern faces

Unbridled horses are dangerous

experience is recovered by returning to your death spot and praying at your grave. Constitution is recovered by paying donations to an NPC healer. Death penalties in DAoC are fair and balanced.

Other issues in combat are that as a caster it is very difficult to escape from an aggroed mob. As a cleric there are no root spells or fast casting stuns that can keep a mob off you and movement speed is too slow to get away anywhere. Instead you are given a once every 30 seconds instant casting mez with a high resist rate. If a tank can't taunt the mob off you, you're pretty much dead.

Killing monsters however is not the only way to gain experience and levels in DAoC. A complex quest engine allows players to earn experience by delivering items or finding a certain type of object. It makes for a good change and is a godsend when grouping just becomes unbearable.

Mythic has also added some anti-twinking code with level restricted items. For example, a cleric can not wear chainmail until level 20. This means that no matter how uber they simply can't use the item until level 20. Items also decay and a character that uses an item well above their level range will cause it to decay faster.

Movement speed in the game is very slow but witnessing RvR it becomes apparent why. It's not to make the game easier but is how Mythic manages the huge number of players in one area at any one time. Travelling around DAoC is made possible through the use of horses that only cost 5 silver. Trips become more expensive if you need to change for connecting horses.

Realm vs. Realm

RvR is the defining factor of DAoC and offers a completely viable high end game. You're not going to be able to login at level 15 and do much, it's not until over level 38 (max level is 50) that you will actually survive an offensive assault. Expect a good 500 - 600 hours of levelling before you're there.

The absolute epic nature of RvR is amazing as you become part of a MASSIVE army. RvR encounters bring some 300 people into battle - an awe-inspiring feat. Nukes pound down on the enemy as dozens of archers let loose arrows. Tanks from both sides charge into battle while catapults lay waste to enemies and battering rams bring down keep doors.

The adrenalin was real and being a part of a truly epic battle is phenomenal. Vanquished

players scream for help and tactics are constantly being yelled out by raid leaders. Thankfully you never lose anything in RvR: neither experience nor items. In fact you can only play one race per server and since different races can't talk to one another, you can't even be insulted by your vanquisher.

DAoC is a visually striking game that consistently remains impressive. Sound is poorly implemented and even incomplete but as this is an online game, there's a very good chance this will improve. The Net code is a remarkable success and despite the lack of a local server, Australian players will have no latency problems at all. Modem users can play the game just fine but anything over 100 players in a raid and a 56k modem would not cope. The gameplay in a good group is both fun and satisfying - in a bad group the game is painfully frustrating. Content wise DAoC is lacking, especially when compared to its competition. Dungeons are miniscule and there just aren't enough of them. In fact, if you're already an EQ player and are perfectly satisfied then DAoC is unlikely to appeal. If you're new to MMORPG's or are ready to leave your current online game then DAoC is an excellent choice.

Jere Lawrence

RATING

FOR

■ Spectacular 3D outside world engine
■ Latency free network code
■ Epic Realm vs Realm raids

AGAINST

■ Inexperienced community
■ Solo play is tedious
■ A "friendlier" Everquest

OVERALL

EQ lovers are better off staying; for newcomers this is a good place to start.

76

WW II Online: Blitzkrieg

Massively multiplayer patching is now a reality!

Firing at sounds in the distance

"Don't shoot! I'm a bloody Nazi too!"

Awaiting the onset of war

James reboots his old tank after a crash

The most ambitious massively multiplayer online game yet, World War 2 Online: Blitzkrieg grants players from around the world the chance to relive the biggest war in history. Using painstakingly modeled hardware, unit structures, supply lines and maps, players fighting for the French, Germans or British can now use hindsight and modern tactics to play out the blitzkrieg all over again.

This is no small undertaking. Even at one half scale, the game map is gigantic. Spanning Germany, the low countries, France and the bottom of England; the rivers, fields, towns, fortresses, are all laid out for the taking. Even the Maginot line, the chain of French fortifications that makes Star Wars look sensible by comparison. All on one 3D map, contested by thousands of players popping in and out as they see fit. As a gameplay model, it seems like a recipe for disaster. Get ready for a surprise: it is!

Loose lips sink ships

Every piece of news that has accompanied the development process behind WWII Online has said more or less the same thing: great idea, shame about the game. The very first version released had most of the documented features missing, and even a steady stream of patches has not fully rectified matters. Bugs are numerous and distracting, and anything resembling real tactics has yet to emerge. Ironically, the game mechanics encourage the passe tank rush technique, which is exactly what the Blitzkrieg, or "lightning war" was all about.

Actual progress is made by capturing "radio desks" inside enemy structures. This can only be performed by infantry, distinguishing them from the faster and more powerful vehicular units. When buildings in one area are held by different sides, the place is considered contested. When one side falls, the occupying forces can spawn all they want from their new stronghold. This little feature ignores the whole supply line ethos expounded by the game design, but then if this war was realistic it'd be over in six weeks.

Breathing room

Community can be found in a rigid Order of Battle that ties each side together, but those not out to schmooze their way to the top of the command tree can jump in on any side, at any time, and play any role. Fighter pilot, commando, tank gunner, truck driver - it's all there for the taking. But to take full advantage of the pseudo social interaction provided, players do best to join the Order of Battle, as online gaming isn't nearly as much fun without a clan.

Each brigade has its own chat channel, to help the members of its squads make sense of their world and co-ordinate attacks.

> **"The controls are needlessly complex... you need to hold down three keys at once just to fire your gun "**

To keep the scale small, a few levels of organisation seem to have been stripped away: Platoons, Companies and Battalions. This little bit of artistic license allows the comparatively small number of online players to fill out the army groups being simulated. It's perfectly understandable, since it significantly increases everyone's

Red flames are bad

This unfortunate would look better than a hole in his back

Go forth! You brave young soldiers
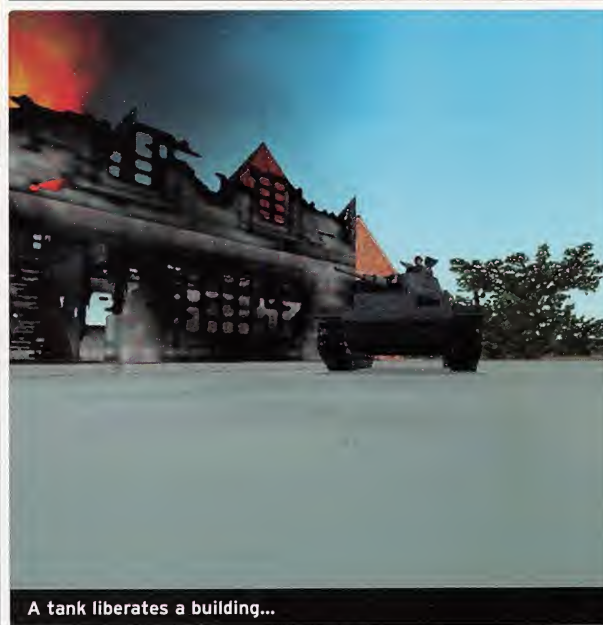
A tank liberates a building...

REWRITE HISTORY!

What if the Axis had won the war? This line of geo-political speculation was first examined to any real degree in the classic Philip K. Dick novel The Man In the High Castle, with an occupied America divided between German and Japanese forces. Another excellent example is Jin-Roh, an animated film from Japan with SS death squads in power armour. Less excellent examples are Luftwaffe 1946 and Mortyr. Remember, it's not neo-nazism, it's sci-fi fandom, which makes it okay.

chance of being a Brigadier.

It's not all dive-bombers and tank rushes. Some of the tasks you can choose from are a little more pedestrian, and some mere mortals would even swear boring. Like towing artillery pieces around. Or driving trucks full of crates up to the front line. One wonders why these sorts of duties couldn't have been assigned to bots, freeing up human brain resources for the real business of combat. It's a mute point anyway, as spawning is typically used as a substitute for the boring procedure of driving back and forth.

The Fighting Hellfish

The controls are needlessly complex. While they have been scaled back from the ludicrous conventions of the beta releases, which allowed for the detailed dismantling and accidental detonation of grenades, you still need to hold down three keys at once just to fire your gun. Better yet, the default key layout makes this next to impossible.

The graphics are clean and functional enough, but nothing to write home about. Higher graphics modes can throw in the odd bit of indestructible turf and shrubbery, but for low end users, a suitable title would

be "War comes to Flatland." Soldiers, weapons and vehicles all have just enough detail to be told apart, and a game as broad reaching as this can be forgiven for having the bulk of its effort spent elsewhere. Where this effort was spent, though is a mystery. Lag fluctuates wildly, and gameplay oversights become devastating for tactics. Patching may have overtaken this review by the time it hits the presses, but as of this writing one could use plane landing gear to flip over tanks, greenery to guard against any enemy fire, and riverbeds to move armoured columns. Pity the poor Yankee fools who bought this game mid last year, when it was impossible for most to even log on.

Not a patch on the real thing

The biggest problem with WW2O doesn't lie in any one facet of its design, which is quite unique and unparallelled. The simple fact that the game is so preposterously ambitious is what pulls it down. An internet connection is vital not merely to play, but also to patch. The version out of the box is unplayable.

For anyone toying with the idea of exploring the strange new worlds of massively multiplayer online gaming, one

Airborne massacre

Let us fly from this acursed war

"Developer's headquarters in sight... OVER"

The theatre of World War II

RATING ●

FOR

■ Huge world
■ Epic Action
■ Very retro

AGAINST

■ Unreliable
■ Unwieldy
■ Unresponsive

OVERALL

A patch too far. Get Wolfenstein instead.

51

thing above all others must be kept in mind. You will need broadband. You WILL need broadband. You will NEED broadband. Your first day of "owning" WWII Online will likely be spent downloading patch after patch after patch. All of these games seem to require a long string of patches to be installed, one after the other, in an endless daisy chain of over-ambitious code rogering. WW2 Online is special in that it obliges you to keep track of two completely different code stacks.

The PlayNet software, relatively small in size, to be sure, is in a constant state of flux. Thankfully, each download is relatively tiny. The game code itself is less forgiving: the patch from version 1.0 to version 1.50 is over 100 megabytes in size. So all of you High Ping Bastards on dial-up can stop reading now. Even ADSL victims with their measly download caps will have to think twice about this one. Only cable internet users are in the position to even think about a commitment to the intricacies of WWIIO, a game that makes Anarchy Online look like Alley Cat.

Cornered rats of Tobruk

And that's just to get working code.

Loading the finished product can take upwards of five minutes. This is a throwback to the days of Commodore 64 tapes drives, though to their credit they eventually got load times down to around 30 seconds. This is definitely a game where you fire it up, then go and get a cup of coffee. Then reboot when it locks up. On the plus side, these lags offer a chance to read through the excellent, though largely fanciful documentation.

The subscription charge is a cool US$9.95 per month. Thanks to our wildly fluctuating currency, that could approach the cost of a new car any second. And for your money, you get access to a server that's down as often as it's up. As a contingency plan, Blitzkrieg subscribers may wish to keep versions of Sopwith and Scorched Earth on their hard drives as preparation for the inevitable outages.

The only good bug is a dead bug

World War 2, for all its over-exposure in the media, is the last real war we can be proud of. Prior conflicts are too primitive to identify with, and every one since is tainted with political incorrectness. Also, it was the last war that took place on a scale we could comprehend. Granted, it straddled the

globe, but most of it was armies of legitimate combatants of comparable strength meeting head on. Nowadays war has sublimated to become something more like disease, or the weather. While the poorest nations skirmish endlessly, the West is only involved with terribly one-sided stints of carpet bombing or terrorism. And these days, it's almost always the civilians who die. Sure, you can descend into fantasy for games subject matter, but it's harder to get excited about weapons and armies that never existed.

In terms of social relevance and acceptability, WWIIO can't be beat; it's just a shame the code doesn't work. The WWIIO team promise that future releases will detail every theatre and combatant in the Second World War, and that includes Australia. The Battle of the Coral Sea will have to wait, though, as at the rate they're going it'll take at least a year of patching to get anywhere close to the stability a world at war requires. Bigger is not always better. On that note WWII Online is the proverbial house of cards, destined to collapse under its own weight.

James Cottee

Serious Sam

The Second Encounter

The screaming has become unbearable
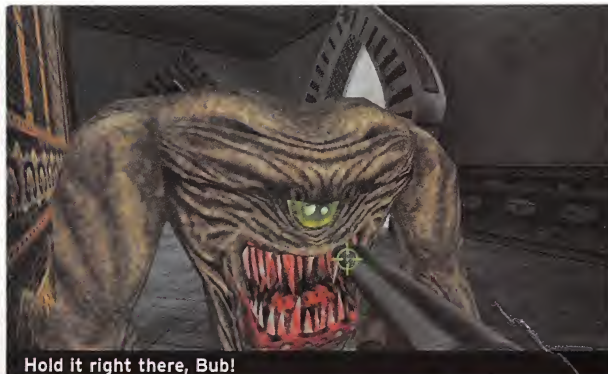
Hold it right there, Bub!

Office vote for coolest beast in Serious Sam
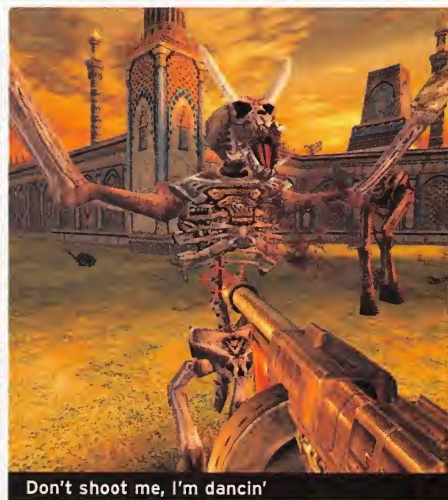
Don't shoot me, I'm dancin'

All appeared to be going well for Sam "Serious" Stone after the climax of the first game. He'd defeated the minions of the nefarious Mental, kicked some serious booty and lived to tell the tale. Stowing away on the mothership, Serious Sam set out for Sirius to kick the alien nasties where it hurt most. Unfortunately Sam finds himself stranded in South America where he must locate a number of transporters and the Holy Grail to continue on his quest.

In an amusing and definitely odd opening movie it is illustrated just what leads to the crash of the mothership. Croteam, the designers, riding on crates decide to follow the ship. To keep up the designers must accelerate to "crate speed", causing them to lose control and crash into the mothership, causing it in turn to crash back to Earth.

Shoot damn it, shoot!

The spirit of this FMV continues through the rest of the game. Hordes and hordes of Mental scum get blasted to the sounds of cock rock and "witty" one liners from Sam. If you're looking for a game that requires

intricate tactics and careful planning look elsewhere, this is Serious Sam. It's all about hitting the trigger as fast as you can whilst circle strafing like there's no tomorrow. Gameplay is identical to the first game - you shoot everything that you can see and then spray randomly just in case there's some invisible monsters lurking around. Thankfully some new monsters, locations and weapons have been added to the mix to spice things up.

Instead of the game being set solely in Egyptian landscapes, Serious Sam moves from Aztec to Babylonian to Eastern European Gothic to purely fantasy settings like Lava caves or a giant castle built on a lake of mirror like ice. The new landscapes are beautiful and fully utilise the tweaked Serious engine. Levels are uniformly well designed, ranging from simple setups where literally hundreds of enemies swarm at Sam down a long corridor making it more like a shooting gallery than anything else.

These numerous levels are straightforward blasting fun but the real genius comes into play with the special levels. Such as one in which the walls are jump pads causing Sam to fly back and forth whilst enemies do the same or another in which gravity is constant meaning that both Sam and the monsters can walk on walls and the roof as well as the floor. New weather effects don't change play a great deal but intermittent snow and rain do make for a nice change from the blistering sun of the first game.

> "...new monsters, locations and weapons have been added to the mix to spice things up."

Pumpkin-headed Treelopper

Seven new monsters have been added to the rogues' gallery making for more variety in the killing. The new beasts range from fireball throwing demons to our personal favourite, Cucurbito the Pumpkin, a pumpkin headed, overall wearing redneck who loves nothing more than playing with chainsaws. The enemy AI hasn't been much upgraded from that in Serious Sam - the

Serious Sam features new beasties and old favourites

Office vote for best weapon in Second Encounter

TBe dazzled by the sheer size and scope of the levels

"I'm a lumberjack and I'm okay..."

enemies are still quite dumb, usually charging willy-nilly into the fray or firing off shots at random. The dumb enemy AI does not detract from the overall game in any way, in fact it is the only thing that makes it playable. Imagine having to face hundreds of angry demons, undead and mechs if they actually had some clue about tactics. The game would be impossible.

Three new weapons and four new power ups make up the final additions to Serious Sam. The weapons are the sniper rifle, flame-thrower and flesh tearing, bone shattering chainsaw. The new weapons look fantastic with beautifully rendered models and effects. One very nice feature of the sniper rifle is that the more you zoom in the more damage it does. Whilst the rifle can be fired normally without zooming in, it does only a little damage. When zoomed in the damage seems to increase exponentially making for some easy one or two shot kills.

Tommy Kills 'em Good

Though most of the weapons are well designed and a lot of fun there is a little problem with the Tommy Gun. It's too good. It has a high rate of fire, does a lot of damage and is incredibly accurate at long

distances. This is all well and good in the single player game but on deathmatch it poses some problems. You can literally be sniped with a machine gun from across the field. New powerups include invulnerability, invisibility, Serious Speed and Serious Damage. Trust us, you need these to survive.

In addition to the single player mode there is a cooperative mode allowing two or more players to tackle the single player game simultaneously, a deathmatch mode and Seriously Warped Deathmatch, one of the most popular mods for the original game.

The game is beautiful. Levels are varied, lushly rendered, weapon effects are suitably spectacular and enemy animation is fluid and rather creepy at times. Likewise the sound effects are high quality ranging from the unnerving cries of the headless kamikazes to the Earth shattering kabooms of the big explosions. The music harkens back to the halcyon days of the mid 80's when guitars were shaped like weapons, leather was studded and hair was big. The music is cock rock to the nth degree with some atmospheric stuff thrown in for good measure.

Where do I sign up?

Even with all of the raving that can be done about the tweaked engine, beautiful textures, great levels and fun monsters there's still something holding Serious Sam - The Second Encounter back from being a classic. From the opening level through to the final end of level boss it's just more of Serious Sam. The Second Encounter is definitely a stand alone add-on rather than a fully-fledged sequel. It's fun to mindlessly kill things for a while and collect bigger and badder weapons but with the same (although heavily tweaked) engine as the First Encounter and no real ground broken, this definitely isn't sequel territory.

Daniel Wilks

Europa Universalis II

The European Union returns

Glorious Maps

England and France have always hated one another

Use merchants to gather your horde of beautiful wealth

Scattered outposts of the empire

The world has turned upside down! The original Europa Universalis was only reviewed in PC PowerPlay last month so the imminent release of its sequel can be seen as i. the quickest attempt in development history to address some of the complaints gamers had with the initial release; or ii) an indication of the mayhem that is regionalised release scheduling. Of course, the latter is the closest to truth. The original Europa Universalis was based on an obscure French board game about European history, and this new game goes further by opening up the possibility of playing non European and minor nations, whilst emphasising the social and political intricacies of historical nations.

Intermediate History

Europa Universalis II is an extremely detailed simulation of historical forces and the constraints they place on national aspirations. The game spans the period of history from 1419 to 1820, slightly expanding the scope of the initial release, and allowing players to take the roles of more than just the major European nations of the time. It also allows you to play through some of the most tumultuous periods in European history, from Henry V's invasion of France during the Hundred Years War to the conquests of Napoleon in the early 19th century. Although you can only control one nation, all the others are in play as well. Any of the countries that existed during the period from the 100 Years War to the Napoleonic Wars can be played.

The game revolves around different scenarios, most focussing on a specific period of history and particular events including a recreation of the conquests of Napoleon and an American campaign. There's also the "Fantasia" campaign that only includes a handful of major nations spread around the world, where the rules for victory can be changed to whatever you wish - from mission based objectives to accumulating "victory points". But the main challenge of the game is the Grand Campaign, which stretches over four hundred years and can get extremely complex to manage.

So you want to rule the world?

You can lead and expand your nation by whatever means you choose. Strategy encompasses the military, production, economy, religion, colonisation and others. You can ask for permission to send troops into a foreign land without declaring war, recruit privateers to harass foes on the sea, hire mercenaries to augment your regular armed forces, use missionaries to convert the local populace and ease the chances of revolt, and heroically proclaim yourself the sole defender of a particular faith.

It's the complete freedom of choice that makes this game so massively addictive and time consuming.

There is a huge range of diplomatic options: issuing of letters of introduction to new nations, sending expensive gifts, or offering up a royal family member for marriage. Other options have economic and strategic benefits, such as trade agreements, military access and alliances, and opportunities to exchange

All of this will one day be mine...

One the third day, God painted the world in pastels

The map tells the story

Maps, maps, maps ... did we mention maps?

geographical discoveries.

You can also control your nation's domestic policy. A nation's attitude towards certain aspects of government, culture, and religion can be changed with slider bars that can be adjusted every 10 years of game time. This allows you to have a state that is slowly moulded to your grand vision, with a choice between many styles of government :a decentralised, plutocratic model or one that is autocratic, free or feudal, narrow-minded, the choice is yours. And it's this unique ability to customise diplomatic policies that makes each game different.

The chance to change history is central to the game's appeal. What if Joan of Arc was accepted into the French military and Sweden made a vassal of Denmark? This is where I was drawn in, with endless scenarios to play out. It's the complete freedom of choice that makes this game so massively addictive and time consuming.

Give me time

Here's hoping you break your leg or have a nasty accident with a door... so that you have heaps of spare time to devote to Europa Universalis II. Even with tutorials covering the basics, players still need to put

in the hard yards playing the campaigns before you work out how everything functions. The thrill is getting caught up in the complex web of military alliances, trade agreements, and politico-religious divisions, as they can fast become your worst nightmare. The challenge is coming to grips with it.

A great thing about Europa Universalis II is the degree of customisation that's available. Right-clicking on any message window will access preferences where you can set limits on how often certain messages should appear or do away with them entirely. You can also change the base difficulty of a game, which affects things such as unit cost, monetary production, and any calculation involving luck.

The game also comes with a terrific soundtrack that contains heaps of authentic pieces from each period, ranging from choral medieval epics and harpsichord music to chamber music. The actual sound effects are pretty ordinary in comparison. The graphics aren't too flash either. However they do manage to reflect the time period during which the game is set, even if it does make it a bit hard to navigate through all the different screens at times. However you can run the game

in high resolutions of up to 1,280 x 1,024 which should help to remedy the graphical problems.

Europa Universalis II's delicate balancing act of religion, politics, economy, military, and more is an amazing feat to behold, however it probably doesn't have the broad appeal of Civilization III because it chooses to go with historical detail over accessible abstraction. But it's this historical detail and complexity that ensures you will play it again and again.

Fiona Halar

RATING

FOR
- Great historical depth
- Completely customisable
- Great replay value

AGAINST
- Steep learning curve
- Average graphics
- Limited appeal

OVERALL
An interest in history and strategygames is an absolute prerequisite

78

B&W: Creature Isle

Where God meets the Mini Game

Neo-Tokyo all over again

"Who are you calling a bunch of animals?"

However, by keeping together we could fight off intruders.

There's no "I" in co-operation. Wait...

Moo Cow

Creature Isle, the first official expansion for Black and White sees the god and his creature being summoned to a distant island by some stalwart sailors and naive natives. Once there it doesn't take long to notice that something is missing from the island - other gods. That's right, there are no other gods to fight against. In place of other gods, the mysterious but gentle Brotherhood of Creatures, a band of godless creatures that roam about at will.

Recently a new creature has been found by the Brotherhood - Eve, the first female creature and the Brotherhood would be interested in having your creature join the ranks to meet her. To do so your creature must complete a number of tasks and challenges set it by the other creatures. Tasks range from the mundane, like watering a garden every day to the downright silly in a seriously funny challenge that involves a guy with a donkey head, some flowers, an anthropo-morphosed zebra and a giant crossbow.

Much like Black and White, Creature Isle is an idiot savant combination of pure genius and frustration, in about roughly

equal proportions. The elements of micro-management of townsfolk and building have been dumbed down for the expansion. The player no longer needs to spend vast amounts of time impressing worshippers with benign (or malevolent) miracles as gameplay concentrates far more on your creature and controlling him. Players can still do what they want to impress the little people but it is no longer absolutely necessary to the flow of the game. The lack of any other gods to fight definitely takes the heat off in the strategy stakes.

Effective training of your creature is the main focus of the game. The interface remains the same - slap seven shades of crap out of it when it's bad and scratch its belly when it behaves well. However you need to be far more careful in doling out both praise and punishment this time round. Many of the tasks require a far more even handed creature, not a glowing eyed avatar of evil. The new tasks require

the effective use of the leash so you'd better get used to the control or you're doomed from the start.

Bowling with Cows

By and large the tasks set the creature use the standard "throw the marker on a sliding surface" type interface. Once these controls have been mastered a number of challenges don't prove to be so challenging after all, merely dull and time consuming. Case in point is a game in which you must beat a chatty cow in 5 frames of bowling. Initially the cow is hard to beat but after a

> **Creature Isle is an idiot savant combination of pure genius and frustration, in roughly equal proportions.**

few frames you quickly get the hang of things and bowl the pants off him. The actual sub game seems to take forever as between every frame there's an animation of your creature and the cow interacting. If you could skip these animations the game would be much more fun and a good deal more pacey. Most tasks seem to have been rushed and not thought through nearly well enough.

Bowlin', Bowlin', Bowlin'

!You're not going anywhere until you tell me what you said!"

What a cute little bear

Animated Lion

Crazy Little Tyke

Probably the most enjoyable and frustrating part of the game would have to be Tyke. In one of the early missions you can rescue a giant baby chicken thing. In a delightful twist, Tyke is basically a standard creature that becomes your creatures' pet or protégé. Your creature is directly responsible for the training of Tyke. As you can assume, this process is always fascinating to watch as well as being incredibly frustrating. Anyone who played Black and White knows that teaching a creature how to act in a certain way is somewhat akin to squeezing blood from a stone. Watching the creature you have trained trying to train another creature is much the same, only multiplied tenfold. Tyke often seems more interested in throwing things off cliff faces than eating and your creature rarely dissuades it from doing what it wants. As frustrating as this becomes you have to stick with it through thick and thin, as your creature's final test is the training of Tyke.

Candy for the Gods

Much like Black and White, Creature Isle is an absolute feast for the eyes. Backgrounds, though simple, are lush and colourful, full of

beautifully animated detail. Likewise the creature effects are superb. Not only does Creature Isle feature all of the creatures you came to know and love in the original game, the expansion pack introduces us to more creatures we can love including a crocodile, mandrill, rhino and a heap of others. When a creature is beaten in a trial you can choose to swap the shape of your creature to that of the one beaten. Whilst it doesn't change gameplay too much, it adds a welcome touch of spice to overall gameplay. That said, it is much easier to fight as the rhino than against him.

You little devils

For the most part the soundtrack and effects of the game are good, not too loud or intrusive and nicely atmospheric. Unfortunately there are a couple of factors that truly grate. First and foremost are the constant cracks from the angel and devil sidekicks. They pop up with infuriating regularity, blow their mouths off and very rarely have anything of substance to say. It would be very nice if they could be turned off but unfortunately the annoying little buggers are there to stay.

Whilst the bad elements of Creature Isle

do seem to be more numerous than the good, the first Black and White expansion pack is still fun to play. Frustrating at times, annoying at others, Creature isle still remains a fascinating addition to Black & White. Watching the evolution of your creature was a joy in Black and White and watching the same creature raise their own in Creature Isle holds the same sense of wonder. That is of course considering you can get the little giant chicken thing to do anything constructive. It may not bring any new converts over to the Black and White franchise but it should keep the punters happy with another 20 or so hours of gameplay.

Daniel Wilks

Deadly Dozen

Holding a knife to the throat of Ben Affleck

Escher's Nazi stronghold

"I can't see anything - where are they shooting us from?!?"

A little to the right maybe...

THe only good Nasty is a a dead Nasty

Not long after the attack on Pearl Harbour which so tragically ended the lives of many of Hollywood's biggest stars and supporting cast members, the US Government bowed to pressure from Telly Savalas and Lee Marvin to form an elite squad. This new team would be made up of the most dangerous, desperate men in the Army's Stockade. Men sent down for loitering suspiciously outside a miniature golf course, or guilty of returning a library book no less than three days late (and with chocolate finger prints on pages 8 and 234). It is with men like these that you will drive the Nazis back over the Rhine and beyond!

With the recent release of Return to Castle Boringstein and Medal of Honor Personal Assault, you might be forgiven for thinking that Deadly Dozen is just a cheap copy designed to cash in on the publicity generated by those big name WWII releases. You cynical sod! (Said the black pot to the Bishop -Ed.) Comparisons have also been made with Hidden & Dangerous but Deadly Dozen is in fact more like a WWII based Ghost Recon, if somewhat less advanced, with a bit of Commandos thrown in for good measure.

You are the commander of 12 men, handpicked for their skills and expendability. You have specialists in small arms, heavy weapons, explosives, stealth, sniping and wry comments on the nature of warfare at your disposal, along with all their usual tools of the trade. Only four team members can take part in an operation so your squad's skills must be managed carefully in order to tailor the team to the mission.

make adjustments in the game options menu to tailor the game more towards either realistic or FPS style play.

Deadly Dozen creates a nice tension during missions with its use of fog, realistic damage (if you choose), Commandos-style enemy AI and atmospheric music. Enemies patrol set routes and linked AI makes them work in teams: sub machine gunners coming forward while the MG42 guy covers them from further back. Dogs and officers

> **"...more like a WWII based Ghost Recon with a bit of Commandos thrown in for good measure."**

Doing it together or going solo

Once you begin a mission there are basically two ways to play Deadly. If you like the idea of having a team around you during missions, then you can give squad orders to your men such as 'attack my target', 'hold fire', 'stay', 'roll over', 'shake hands' or what have you. Or if you prefer a more FPS style game you can simply tell your guys to stay put and switch between each of them via hotkeys when you need each of their particular skills. You can also

can alert guards if they spot you, and enemy morale is also a factor. If an enemy's morale fails, he may run or go berzerk and charge at you guns blazing! The mission maps are also very dynamic, not totally pre-planned like a typical FPS based game such as Medal of Honor. Tanks and cars patrol, troops move around and reinforcements can be called in.

But the best and most important thing about the mission maps is that they are a lot more open than a typical FPS style map.

It's not raining so it mustn't be MoHAA

Equipment your team prior to missions
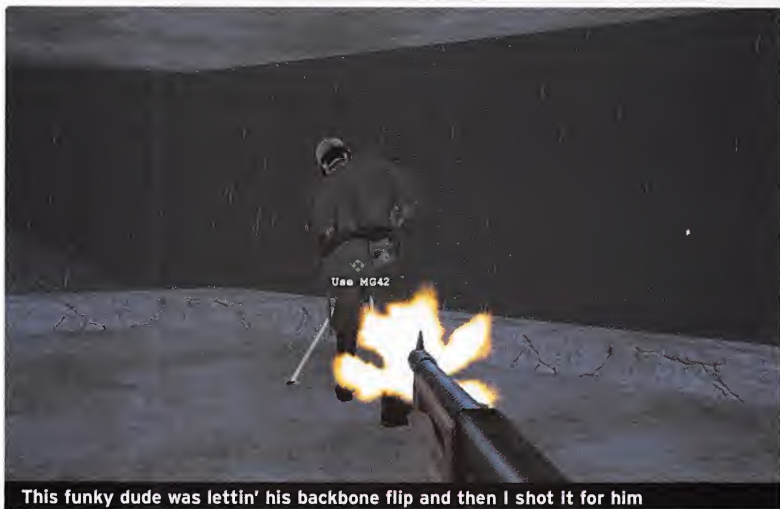
This funky dude was lettin' his backbone flip and then I shot it for him
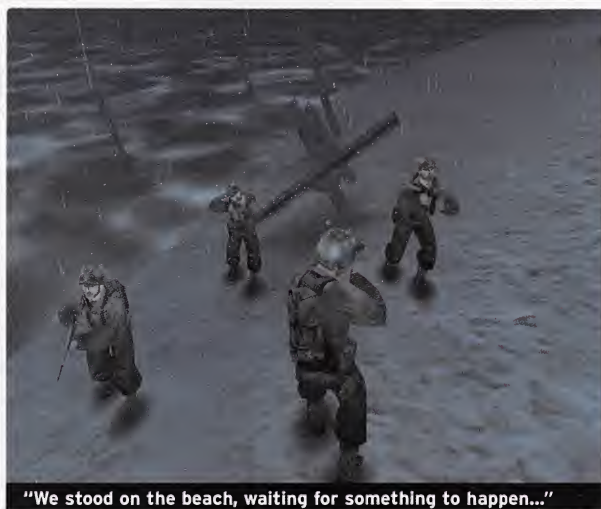
"We stood on the beach, waiting for something to happen..."

DEADLY DOZEN ON DVD

The Deadly Dozen is of course based on the film The Dirty Dozen starring the great Lee Marvin, Ernest Borgnine, Charles Bronson, Jim Brown and of course Telly. If it's been a while, take the opportunity to see the newly remastered version on DVD!

They allow the player to develop his own strategy of approach and engagement rather than leading him by the nose along narrow country roads or through heavily scripted missions.

SNAFU

nFusion, Deadly's developers, has previously specialised in hunting games - which may or may not be of concern. In the US Deadly was released as a budget title, retailing at just $US20 and as such your expectations should be a bit lower than they are with mega-budget games such as MOHAA.

Sadly there are other problems to report. For a start there is no multiplayer mode at all as there wasn't time to do it.

The option to 'go prone' was also left out for the same reason.

nFusion made their own engine for Deadly and considering the budget nature of the game they've done a pretty good job. The maps are large but kept manageable with the old fog cliche. The game engine itself is more like an FPS engine than say the Delta Force or Op Flashpoint engine - hence the fog. The advantage of this however is that the player can move from external to indoor areas without missing a beat or whacking the frame rate as happens in both of those other games.

Men being Shot

It is also important to remember that your team mates are not Commandos or special forces, just a bunch of hard cases. So don't go throwing them into danger without planning as they will die, and once gone they don't come back! Your team mates sometimes forget to keep up with you and need to be slapped around. There is another good reason to manage your men carefully - the command interface. There are quite a few controls to remember and not all of them in sensible places on the keyboard. They can be remapped but the

interface is still a bit clumsy.

Another, albeit less annoying, element of the game is the way those pesky Germans always seem to see you first. It's damn hard to get close to them unless you are to the side or rear of their lines of site. If you are approaching them head on they will see you through the fog and start shooting before you can see them. This adds to the tension in a strange way.

The End Bit

Deadly Dozen isn't what they call in the industry a triple A title but even with its faults and idiosyncrasies it is still quite compelling and strangely addictive. The version being released in Australian is the 1.01 version and a 6Mb patch is available to take it up to the latest 1.03 version, fixing various problems with the AI and some weapon behaviours. If you were expecting a bit more of a tactical game from MOHAA or Wolfy then you may be better suited to Deadly Dozen. It's certainly worth a look since it's selling here as a budget title.

George Soropos

Tropico: Paradise Island

El Presidente! The American tourists are revolting!

Downtown Cigarsville

Big houses in the Sun

El Presidente's humble abode

Flash and glamour for foreign guests

"Get back to work, Manuel!"

RATING

FOR

- New buildings
- More scenarios
- More variety

AGAINST

- Doesn't change the game
- Leisure focussed
- More of the same

OVERALL

If you're a Tropico fan, this is a valuable addition to your gaming arsenal

74

Tropico is a management game that gives players more freedom than most similar titles, in terms of options that can be adjusted before a game begins. In this sense, the player must experiment in order to learn all the game has to offer. For instance, always choosing a stable political situation means never having to use troops to stop rebellions. The Paradise Island expansion pack has tried to offer enough new buildings and other features so that no matter which style you like to play, you'll see these additions in action.

The first new bits you're likely to notice are the new character traits in the setup menus. You can now come to power through a Hotel corporate buyout. This makes you popular with the capitalist faction and has several other benefits. Another new trait is to have been a Travel Agent, which obviously gives you lots of tourism bonuses.

Most of the new buildings are there to entertain or pamper the tourists on your little paradise, hence the name. There are new accommodation structures like the Beach Villa which houses four upper class

tourists in luxury, along with lots of new entertainment options such as the Movie Theatre. Your tourists can be entertained by a new Tennis Court, miniature golf course, a conservatory, nature preserve, colonial fort, duty free shop or even a trip to El Prez's childhood home which draws locals from your island to it as well as those foreign dogs. The biggest of the new structures is the Sports Complex where your glorious Tropico soccer team takes on the likes of Brazil, Argentina and occasionally Leeds, when they can't find anywhere else to score; and we're not talking goals here.

The new structures aren't all for the tourists however. The wealthy citizens of Tropico have been spoilt with a new luxury apartment building, the Condominium, which requires electricity before it can be built. The military minded have also been looked after with the large new Army Base building that is staffed by generals and recruits your citizens ito the armed forces. These newly trained soldiers are ideal for protecting the wealth of their glorious Prez.

If you like random events the new tropical weather effects will introduce you to all manner of disasters. Hurricanes, tropical storms, hoof and mouth disease

and red tide. You will lose both people and buildings to these new forces of nature. Fragile buildings crumble, including homes, docks and bunkhouses. Crops are wasted and morale will suffer.

There are new characters as well: "Eco-Tourists" and "Spring Break Tourists" who are both after very different things in a holiday destination: nature and booze! New edicts such as a "World Geographic Special" draw more Eco-Tourists, and a new Social Security system increases respect among voters. Though to some the most important new feature will be inclusion of over twenty new scenarios, like a Gilligan's Island map along with a good variety of others: political, economic and just plain silly.

Lastly there are a few gameplay enhancements as well, including the full rotation of many buildings, a more powerful version of Martial Law, and supposedly faster building construction, which we couldn't really notice as being any different. All in all this is a pretty extensive expansion pack and should keep Tropico fans interested in their favourite game for some time to come.

George Soropos

Pepsi Max Extreme Sports

Pepsi now make you pay for their commercials

Come fly with me, let's fly, let's fly away

SELECT CHARACTER

NINA
AGE 18
WEIGHT 128 lbs
HEIGHT 5'7"
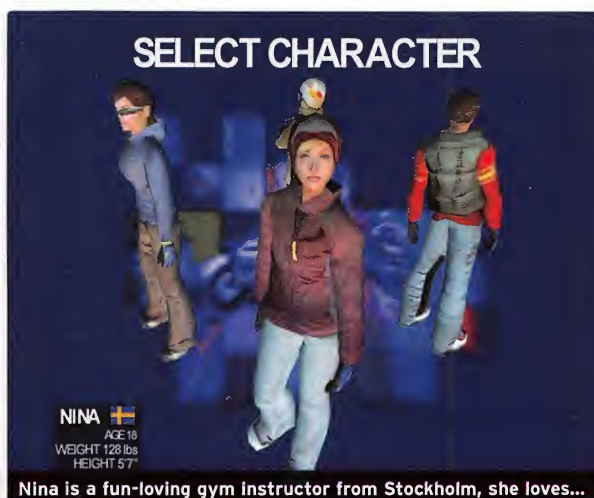
Nina is a fun-loving gym instructor from Stockholm, she loves...

Quad racing kicks tubs
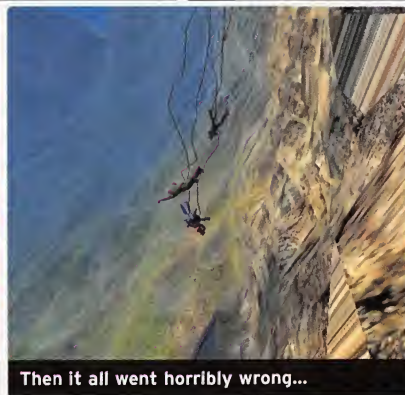
Then it all went horribly wrong...

Mountain biking rules

If you think chasing down a Pepsi-stealing cheetah on a mountain bike is radical, think again. Pepsi Max Extreme Sports Challenge (PMESC) may have been better named "Insane Sports Challenge". The trendy, fearless participants of the game partake in an assortment of daunting events, including snowboarding off a Himalayan mountain-edge (straight into a sky-surfing routine), hang gliding behind speeding aeroplanes and quad-racing through dense traffic. No wonder there are only four competitors.

'Extreme' is no understatement

The aim of the game is to race the other contestants in an extreme-sports medley comprised of snowboarding, mountain-biking, speed gliding and ATV (quad) racing. Bungee-jumping and sky surfing events can also be unlocked along the way - as can bonus tracks. The controls are straightforward, and well suited to a gamepad. There are buttons for 'speed-boost', 'action', 'trick' and 'attack'. I finished the whole game without using the attack button once - it is totally useless. Performing tricks in most events requires hitting a simple combination of directions, followed by the trick button. The exception is

snowboarding, where you simply hold the trick button at the same time as one of the direction keys. Pulling off tricks increases your 'speed boost', which gives your character superhuman speed for a short time. The 'action' button is used to do a variety of things, such as releasing a parachute, jumping, or disconnecting the Bungee cord. Although your trick repertoire is undersized (only three per event), this does not detract from the fun, as the emphasis is racing to the next checkpoint, not doing stunts. The frictionless transition from one event to the next makes for a smooth and fast-paced style of play.

A most notable feature of PMESC is the enormous landscapes. Although some of the textures look a bit shoddy on close inspection, you won't have time to notice as you hurtle past, and from a distance the backdrop is almost photo-realistic. The characters and vehicles - despite being unsophisticated, low polygon models - are animated smoothly and move realistically. The fact that the models are a bit crude can be forgiven somewhat, considering the truly expansive levels and breathtaking scenery.

Is this really a PC game?

PMESC has evolved from the Dreamcast

title, Sega Extreme Sports and the console look and feel is regrettably obvious. For example, you cannot use the keyboard to type your name, instead each letter must be selected individually with the arrow keys. The rudimentary game modes are available (practise, time trial, single race and championship) but there is unfortunately no multiplayer option. Only four characters are available to play, thus leaving a mere three computer opponents throughout the game. The detail level can be adjusted to suit your system, but the game can only run in 640x480 or 800x600 resolutions. Little (or no) effort has been made to restructure this game for the PC.

The super cool record label, Ninja Tune provides the soundtrack. Their beats are undeniably hip and groovy. All in all, the entire audio department is catered for nicely as the sound effects are also quite good.

Despite being unashamedly of console origin, very short on options and at times lacking polish, Pepsi Max Extreme Sports Challenge is undeniably fun to play, and that is, after all, what a good game is all about. Worth considering if you're after an easy-to-learn arcade sports game (or an interactive Pepsi commercial), but don't make it a priority if you're not.

Victor Webster

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COMMAND & CONQUER RENEGADE

tech in review

H ey cats and babies, it's time again to round-up all the latest that the technical world has to offer and delve deep into the horrors of the PowerPlay Bunker. It is with much wailing and moaning that I must inform you that this will be my last month as the technical editor of the mag that you currently hold in your hot little hands. Never fear - I will be back, bigger, faster and stronger than before, sporting the shiny and important title of News Editor. In the metallic warbeast that is PowerPlay Voltron I shall now form the spleen.

With that out of the way lets get down to the dirty business of reviews shall we? First off this month we pit a range of new, shiny and ultra-flat 15" LCD monitors against each other in a gladiatorial battle to the death. Who comes out on top? Will it be the Hercules Prophetview? How about the Mitsubishi Diamond View or maybe the Samsung Syncmaster? Read on and find out 'cos I'm not going to give away the ending yet. In Hotware we feast our eyes on a fantastic new system from Jaton, a P4 Northwood 2.2GHz CPU, an inevitable swag of motherboards and pit some new speakers against each other in an audio battle royale.

Well, I've had fun here during my tenure but as they say in some of the less reputable bars in town, "it's been swell but the swelling's gone". I'm out of here but don't take that as a cue to misbehave. I still have my eye on you. Be good my little Droogies, I know where you live.

Daniel Wilks
Tech Editor
danielw@next.com.au
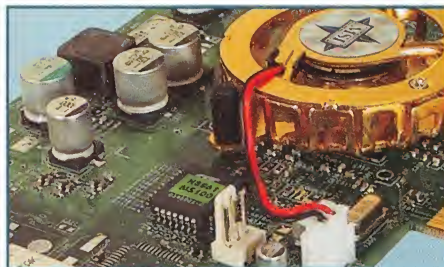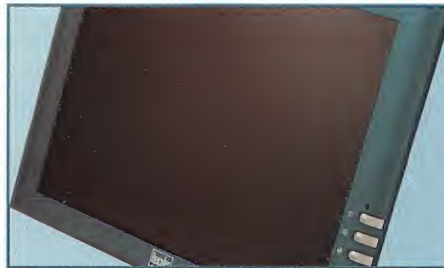
tech in review
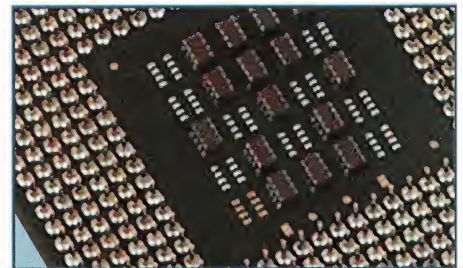
THE PCPP REVIEW SCORING SYSTEM

PC PowerPlay GOLD AWARD

90+	Gold Award. A classic, everyone will love this game.
89-80	A strong title that's hard to fault. But perhaps not the best in its field.
79-60	Competent and playable. For fans of the genre.
59-40	Decidedly average, probably boring.
39-0	A dog. Bad, shamelessly unoriginal, cheap and horrible. Avoid.

CORRECTION

The PCPP Tech Bunker would like to make an apology to Jaton for some technical errors made in the review of the $1500 Challenge system (PCPP#70). Contrary to the review the system contained 256Mb RAM, not 128Mb and came with a fully licenced copy of WinME. Had the system been described correctly, it may have received a more favourable review. PowerPlay regrets any inconvenience or disappointment caused.

FLATLANDERS

Trapped inside a fishbowl for all eternity by an evil Level 9 Thing from Wizardry 8, Daniel Wilks was recently freed by a swashbuckling party of adventurers and to celebrate, took a look at 9 of the least fishbowly objects he could find.

In keeping with last month's tech feature on the future of monitors this month we have decided to have a look at 9 different LCD monitors from various manufacturers to see how they stand up against each other and the humble CRT. All monitors were tested on both an Athlon 1600+ system with 256Mb DDR RAM and GeForce 3 Ti200 and a 2.2Ghz Pentium with 256Mb DDR RAM and GeForce 3 Ti500. We put each screen through a day of rigorous testing looking at the following things:

Ease of installation - How easy was the monitor to install?

Ease of use - How easy is the monitor to use, are there any one touch setup buttons, are buttons well marked.

Colour contrast - Many LCD monitors have difficulty showing subtle colour contrast, especially blacks. Highly detailed pictures and animations such as found in 3D Mark 2001 were used to test the level of colour contrast.

Brightness - Throughout all testing the overall brightness was checked. Unless otherwise stated all monitors showed an acceptable level of brightness.

Motion blur - Instead of refreshing like a standard CRT monitor, LCD screens refresh on a pixel level, each individual liquid crystal changing colour on its own. Due to this many LCD monitors have a problem with fast motions blurring due to lag in pixel colour change. Quake 3 was used to test for blurring. During testing we defined a slight or little motion blur to be barely noticeable and didn't hamper gaming in any way.

General gaming - A number of games of varying details were played on the monitors to see overall game performance.

Viewing angle - Are there any problems with viewing the image from different angles. Unless otherwise stated no problems were noted.

While LCD monitors may not be beating out the humble CRT for the gaming market for the time being they are definitely making inroads. Here's a look at the current crop.

Philips 150B2

Cheap but not nasty best describes the Philips 150B2. With a price below $1000 this monitor certainly delivers bang for your buck. Though it doesn't look like much other than a plain beige oblong with a few unobtrusive buttons the 150B2 provides excellent image quality with a minimum of motion blur. When using the auto-adjust button on the monitor brightness seems to be somewhat of an issue as the auto detected image often comes up too dark to see fine details but luckily all of the settings can be changed manually. The face buttons are easy to use and fairly well marked so there should be no problems during setup.

The 150B2 showed outstanding colour clarity and depth including blacks. There was no lack of detail evident in shadows and dark backgrounds. Unfortunately there is one major flaw we picked up with the monitor during testing. Much like a pacifist it doesn't like explosions. During the many and frequent explosions seen in Quake 3 the 150B2 suffered from some pretty serious motion blur as the LCDs tried to change colour too fast. Though we could still play, the blur and colour change during explosions did make Quake3 more difficult than usual. If you want to play FPS you'll have to look elsewhere.

DETAILS

DISTRIBUTOR	PRICE	URL
Philips	$975	www.philips.com.au

RATING

A great monitor in all respects apart from its ability to explode **85**

Hercules Prophetview 720

A winning combination of style and substance mark the Prophetview 720 as an excellent piece of tech and a surprisingly low price tag does nothing to hurt that reputation. With a cool metallic blue chassis and boomerang-style base the Prophetview 720 takes up next to no bench space. 5 shiny titanium buttons down the right side of the face of the monitor control all functions making everything very easy to control. The menu system is intuitive, unlike some other monitors, so adjusting settings is an absolute breeze.

Screen resolution and colour is excellent delivering beautifully sharp images and colour saturation. The monitor has been optimised with more of a gaming market in mind so suffers very little from motion blur and aliasing making it great for all types of purposes ranging from RTS to FPS and DVD. The price tag of $950 also makes it more affordable than many of the other flat screen monitors out there.

The addition of a digital input and auto adjust button would have improved the monitor overall but the combination of good looks, excellent performance and affordable price tag make it the TFT LCD monitor to beat.

DETAILS

DISTRIBUTOR	PRICE	URL
Hercules	$950	http://au.hercules.com

RATING

Looks good, works smart and it's not too hard on the wallet **93**

Samsung Syncmaster 151s

The press on this monitor says it's a hot seller and it's easy to see why. Though the look of the monitor is more functional than stylish the performance more than makes up for its Spartan design. Easy to use buttons on the face of the monitor makes setup easy and the ever popular auto-adjust button takes care of all the brute work. A very slim profile and footprint takes up very little space so you won't need to worry about your desk filling up too soon.

The Syncmaster 151s stayed on the test bench for quite a good while due to the quality of the image. Colours showed a good deal of saturation and the monitor suffered very little from that ever-present bugbear motion blur. The monitor did have a few serious problems with blur during Quake tests especially with rail gun shots. Otherwise the Syncmaster 151s performed admirably throughout the testing period getting a lot of play time. A price tag of just under $1000 also makes this monitor quite affordable.

Like we said before, the press for this monitor says that it's a hot seller and after having a look at it we definitely have to agree.

DETAILS

DISTRIBUTOR	PRICE	URL
Samsung	$999	www.samsung.com.au

RATING

A very good TFT LCD at an almost affordable price **89**

▶▶ Benq FP581

▶ The combination of brains and beauty make the Benq FP581 a definite contender. Inside the heart of this swanky retro looking silver monitor lay some special features that make it a definite look in. One of the most noticeable things on the face of the monitor itself is the "i key", an auto-set button that optimises the phase H and V positions as well as the colour warmth. This makes the monitor an absolute joy to set up - just plug it in and push a button. The other control buttons are large but unobtrusive and well marked so it's no problem to do any fine tuning.

Performance wise the Benq FP581 fairs very well with excellent picture clarity and contrast and very little motion blur. Even the built in speakers sound very good. The only real problem we had at all with the Benq monitor is the truly terrible manual. It takes more time explaining how to carry the monitor in delightfully poor English than it does on how to set up and use the monitor. It's easy enough to set up that you won't need a manual but still, the manual is really bad. An excellent LCD monitor which compares favourably with CRT as far as gaming goes.

DETAILS

DISTRIBUTOR	PRICE	URL
Benq	$1188	www.benq.com

RATING
Tastes great and less filling. Minimal motion blur keeps you Quaking

89

▶▶ Hitachi CML153XW

▶ The Hitachi CML153XW LCD monitor is thin - really thin. It takes up hardly any space at all with a footprint of 200mm and an overall screen thickness of around 20mm. Luckily enough the slimline package fits some very decent features to make this monitor worth a second look. The monitor is controlled through the use of 5 face buttons. Though these buttons aren't particularly well marked they are fairly straight forward and easy to use. The monitor also includes built in speakers and a handy headphone jack for all your multimedia needs.

Picture-wise the Hitachi LCD monitor performed well delivering good colour depth and contrast for the most part though it did suffer a distinct lack of differentiation in black making for some very flat looking game levels. The monitor showed a slight tendency towards blurring towards the bottom of the viewable area that no amount of fooling with the settings or changing the viewing angle (between -5 and 35 degrees) could fix. Though the monitor did show some motion blur during fast paced gaming it was definitely within acceptable limits. Overall the CML153XW is a good little LCD monitor which performs well for both games and multimedia functions.

DETAILS

DISTRIBUTOR	PRICE	URL
Hitachi	$1195	www.hitachi.com.au

RATING
A decent LCD monitor with a good slim footprint and decent picture.

84

▶▶ Mitsubishi Diamond Data DV158

▶ The silver plastic design of the Diamond View DV158 looks pretty cheap and more than a little tacky but don't let that fool you, the DV158 is a great little LCD monitor. Controlled with 6 large and well-marked face buttons the monitor is a breeze to install. A one touch auto-adjust button optimises the vertical and horizontal positioning as well a pixel phase and clock. Any other adjustments you may want to make can be simply achieved through an easy to follow OSD. Built in speakers provide fair sound but you'll most probably switch them off in favour of a better set. Slimline design and base make for some serious space saving.

During testing the DV158 performed well but not exceptionally, delivering an excellent bright picture with good colour contrast including blacks but suffered from a fair amount of motion blurring making it unsuitable for any fast paced gaming such as FPS. Other games looked excellent on the DV158 with sharp images and warm colour contrasts.

It's unfortunate that the monitor looks as plastic as it does as the performance far outweighs the looks of the thing. For RPG, RTS and the like the monitor shines. Unfortunately anything more fast paced doesn't fare so well.

DETAILS

DISTRIBUTOR	PRICE	URL
Mitsubishi Electric	$1199	www.mitsubishi-electric.com.au

RATING
It may look fairly cheap and nasty but it's not.

82

IBM T560

As far as looks are concerned the IBM T560 wins hands down. Composed entirely of matte black metal the monitor looks like a Bond villain's display of choice. The metal construction makes it very heavy but that is a secondary consideration when you look at the overall coolness of the design. Built into the monitor is a stand that can also be used as a swivel wall mount making the IBM monitor an excellent space saving device. The design also allows the axis of the monitor to be switched between horizontal and vertical depending on what it needs to be used for. Easy to use buttons also add to the overall functionality. The monitor is set up to accept both VGA and Digital signals so you can finally take advantage of digital out.

After all of the fanfare over design how well does it function for games? Unfortunately not that well. The monitor shows excellent depth of colour with the exception of black which comes out very flat. This makes for some very dull looking gaming especially where shadows are concerned. It also shows a fair degree of motion blur so isn't particularly suitable for fast paced games like Quake3.

DETAILS

DISTRIBUTOR	PRICE	URL
IBM	$1399	www.ibm.com.au

RATING

A great quiet cooler that won't sound like your PC is trying to take off.

59

LG Flatron 575LM

Within the simple looking design of the LG 575LM lays the heart of an excellent monitor. No other monitor we looked at had a richness of colour that could rival this one. No matter what game we threw at it the 575LM gave us beautifully bright images with an outstanding depth of colour. Unfortunately there are some issues with the monitor that make it not as good as the sum of its parts.

The face of the monitor holds a number of very sensitive buttons. Any errant movement can trigger the image to re-size itself or darken the monitor. As can be imagined this is very frustrating. The monitor also comes boxed with some removable speakers. This is not a bad thing until you hear them. They're very tinny and have poor volume control, doing little apart from adding to the price of the product. Gaming-wise the monitor handles itself quite well with little motion blur and the aforementioned beautiful colour. Games with lush colours and backgrounds such as Black and White looked fantastic.

With a change of buttons and a lower price tag the 575LM could be excellent. As it is it's merely good.

DETAILS

DISTRIBUTOR	PRICE	URL
LG	$1199	www.lge.com.au

RATING

With a lower price the 575LM would be excellent instead of merely good

80

Sony SDM M51

It may have a pretty steep price tag (though not as expensive as the IBM flat screen) but the Sony SDM M51 has a lot of features to make up for the hole in your wallet. For a start the monitor shows excellent colour contrast and clarity, good built in speakers and little motion blur. Unfortunately some elements of the design really hamper the good points.

Colour and image clarity on the SDM M51 are outstanding and well worth the price of the monitor. All colour including blacks are shown in great detail and very little motion blur was noticeable. Basically what this means is that the monitor is great for gaming. Built in speakers also provide fairly decent sound though any serious gamers will most probably opt to get some real speakers.

Whilst performance-wise the monitor is great there are some issues clouding the good points. The viewing angle of the monitor was very small, only around 10 degrees. Any further outside this angle range and the picture became very dark and blurred. This isn't a huge problem but is can be very annoying having to adjust the angle of your screen depending on where you are sitting.

DETAILS

DISTRIBUTOR	PRICE	URL
Sony	$1295	www.sony.com.au

RATING

A very good TFT LCD at an almost affordable price

85

tech Hotware

Jaton
Gaming Box

ets take a quick look at the checklist of all of the things we like to be present in our PCs here in the PowerPlay Tech Bunker. Super-fast CPU - check. Stable MoBo - check. Speedy graphics card - check. Good sound - check. Sexy case - check. If we get these things, by and large we are usually happy. At the moment we are very happy. The Jaton Box is a novel idea and one quite to our liking. Instead of upgrading individual parts of your computer, which can be a long drawn out and expensive process, Jaton suggests that you keep your existing peripherals (monitor, keyboard, mouse, etc) and upgrade the entire box at the one time instead. For a price under $2000 you sure get a lot.

To start with the system is based around a powerhouse CPU, the Athlon XP 2000+. With a core clock speed of 1.667GHz this processor is one of the fastest around and will keep your computer current for quite a while to come. We've waxed lyrical about the Asus A7V266-E motherboard in the past and we'll do it again. It's fast, super stable and has all of the extra features to keep gamers and obsessive overclockers happy. With such a solid backbone to base the

system on you know it's going to be a screamer. Trust us, it is. A nice fast GeForce 3 Ti200 takes care of graphics processing. OK, so it's not the fastest card in the deck at the moment, but for under 2 grand could you ask for more? Once again the sound card may not be the current top of the line but it delivers beautiful clear 5.1 surround sound so you have to be happy with that. Storage is taken care of by a mid sized 40Gb Seagate drive and a Sony 24x10x40 CD-RW - just the thing for making those valuable 'off site backups'. The addition of a 16x DVD drive makes the box capable of playing movies right there on your monitor or on your TV utilising the TV out function of the video card.

Performance-wise the Box is a gaming beast, scoring 6827 3D marks in 3D Mark 2001 (default) and averaging 61.82 FPS in the notoriously system intensive Dronez benchmarking (1024x768). What this means is that any game you care to play will be smooth, sexy and have a high enough frame rate to make all of your friends achingly jealous.

There are only two downsides we can see to the Box, the first being that it comes with Windows ME pre installed. You'll most

likely want to install something else as soon as possible. The second problem we have is far more petty. We love our RAM here in the PowerPlay labs and could have done with another 256Mb. The Box is a great idea. Don't upgrade your PC piecemeal, do it all at once. The Box is a cheap and fast alternative to the constant upgrade ethic. Get it all out of the way at once and get back to gaming sooner.

SYSTEM SPECS:

AMD Athlon XP2000+ CPU
Asus A7V266-E MoBo
40Gb Barracuda 7200rpm HDD
256Mb DDR RAM
Leadtek 64Mb DDR GeForce3 Ti200
1.44Mb Sony floppy drive
Sony 16x DVD Drive
Sony 24x10x40 CD-RW
Creative SB Live! DE 5.1 soundcard

Creative
Inspire 5.1 5300 Speakers

RATING

DISTRIBUTOR
Creative Labs
PRICE
$299
URL
www.australia.creative.com

OVERALL

For gaming - great.
For music – not so great.

SCORE

81

Comprising a centre speaker, 4 satellites and a bass the Creative Inspire 5300 speakers look like a whole lot of work setting up. Fortunately looks can be deceiving because the speakers were an absolute breeze to get going. Each speaker can be mounted either on a wall or on a small plastic stand and the cords are more than long enough (2 or 5 metres) to set the front and rear speaker wherever you like, within reason of course. Designed with Soundblaster cards in mind the speakers work well with Live 5.1 and Audigy cards as well as cards such as the GameTheatre or Muse XL.

The speakers perform very admirably when it comes to gaming giving a good rich soundscape, differentiating soundtrack from speech very well and muddying neither. Though the satellites are really quite small at only 6 watts RMS they sound far more powerful in the mid ranges than they have any right too be. The bass has a good meaty thump to it so you can feel rocket launcher shots, artillery and anything else

on the "Barry White" scale resonate through your body. Unfortunately the speakers do not fare so well when it comes to music. High ranges sound quite tinny and muted, the individual satellites being incapable of resonating long enough to give the requisite depth required for most music tracks. At higher volumes the satellites also showed a propensity towards distortion. The lack of a headphone jack is also very disappointing

considering that these speakers are aimed towards the PC market. Headphones are a necessity for any hard-core gamer.

The Creative Inspire 5.1 5300 Speakers are definitely a good setup when it comes to playing games but unfortunately the lacklustre music performance leaves a slightly bitter taste in your mouth. If your PC is for gaming only you could definitely do a lot worse.

Logitech
Z-560 4.1 Speakers

RATING

DISTRIBUTOR
Logitech
PRICE
$499.95
URL
www.logitech.com

OVERALL

So seriously bad they kick their own arse twice a day

SCORE

90

Have you ever fallen into the trap of buying something because it looks really good only to take it home and discover it's terrible? Well, there's no fear of that here with the Z-560, a 4.1 setup that looks and sounds so good that they would kick your arse if you even contemplated looking at another set of speakers. Comprised of 4 very swanky looking satellites and a huge sub and a small stand alone control unit, the speakers look a little intimidating to set up but with relatively little work you can get the job done. The satellites have removable face-plates and whilst this doesn't change the performance of the Z-560's in any respect it's nice to be able to choose how you want them to look.

The first thing you will notice right out of the box is the huge sub. The thing is absolutely enormous. Luckily it has a sound to match, effortlessly pumping out any bass you care to throw at it. The bass resolution is so powerful that you can literally feel the vibrations pulsing through your body. It sounds good enough by itself to rival some

of the stand alone subs of comparable price currently on the market. When combined with the satellites the Z-560's really shine. Aside from looking great the satellites show excellent mid and high range response making them equally good for games and music. Every game or musical track (and there were a number of both) we played

with the speakers sounded fantastic - people from across the office popping their heads up to find out just what the hell we were doing that sounded so good. All of the speakers are THX certified so if you're looking to set up a home theatre on a budget you could do far worse.

tech Hotware

Intel
P4 Northwood 2.2GHz CPU
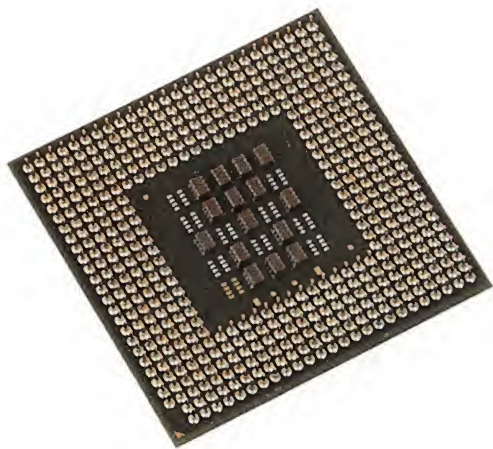
F or the first real time since the release of the new chipset last year the P4 is truly beginning to shine like a sun. Much has been promised with the P4 which the chipset has failed to deliver, causing many Intel devotees to flock back to the P3. With the advent of the 2.2GHz Northwood this should all change. The chip is fast - stinking fast, and runs far

cooler than you may expect clocking in at around 3 degrees cooler than it's little brother the P4 2.0GHz. The 478 pin chip, is absolutely tiny - about 1/2 the size of a comparable AMD chip. What this means is that the chip can process information faster and use less power doing it. The P4 Northwood uses only 1.5v rather than 1.7 like the P4 Willimete, meaning that it runs

cooler overall and can be overclocked far more readily. Testing showed that the chip can be overclocked to 2.6GHz with no problem what so ever. 3.0GHz should be realistically achievable with adequate cooling.

Numbers wise the CPU performs very well scoring 8950 3D marks in 3D Mark 2001 (default) as compared to a comparable XP 2000+ system which scored only 8600. Likewise the Northwood eked out the XP on Quake 3 and Dronez benchmarking scoring 191 and 200 respectively as opposed to 180 and 196. Whilst the difference is only marginal it is still quite noticeable. With P4 boards now being available utilising SD & DDR rather than pricey RD the P4 is becoming a far more attractive gaming solution. The P4 Northwood 2.2GHz CPU is fast, stable as a rock and so overclockable it's not funny. Unfortunately all good things come at a price and the Northwood 2.2GHz is absolutely no exception. You may have to mortgage your house to afford one. It's a price worth paying.

RATING

DISTRIBUTOR
Intel
PRICE
$1386
URL
www.intel.com.au

OVERALL
So fast it throttles the imagination whilst the price throttles your wallet

SCORE

82

Thermaltake
Volcano 7

T his thing is big. Damn big. Not quite big enough to have its own gravity well but pretty damn big none the less. Measuring 77.6mm high and 80 mm square the Thermaltake Volcano 7 is an absolute beast , which is both a good and a bad thing. On the up side something this size can hold an enormous fan and heatsink but on the other some motherboards just won't have room for it

due to capacitors sitting near the CPU. We had no problem installing it in a full tower but with any of the compact cases on the market you might want to try before you buy unless you want to end up with a $50 paperweight. Also if you plan on taking your PC anywhere you may want to disconnect the cooler and take it separately as it comes with only one mounting lug. This is fine when the PC is

stationary but could come loose if the PC gets a good jolt.

Aside from being huge the Volcano 7 would have to be the smartest CPU cooler available. Why is it smart? The cooler comes with a built in heat sensor that controls the fan speed. When the system is idle the fan slows down to around 2900 RPM making it nice and quite. When push comes to shove and system usage becomes intensive the fan speeds up to a maximum of about 5000 RPM, giving the CPU the extra cooling it needs. This system drastically cuts down on the noise of the cooler during idle times as well as making overclocking much easier and far more stable stable.

The Volcano 7 performs very well, keeping any Socket 370 or 462 CPU you care to throw at it including the very speedy yet hot Athlon XP 1900+. If you're looking to overclock your CPU or are just paranoid about excess heat the Volcano 7 is a superb cooler, so long as your case and motherboard can handle it.

RATING

DISTRIBUTOR
Anyware
PRICE
$57
URL
www.anyware.com.au

OVERALL
The smartest heatsink/fan combo in the world.

SCORE

94

MSI
GeForce 4 MX440
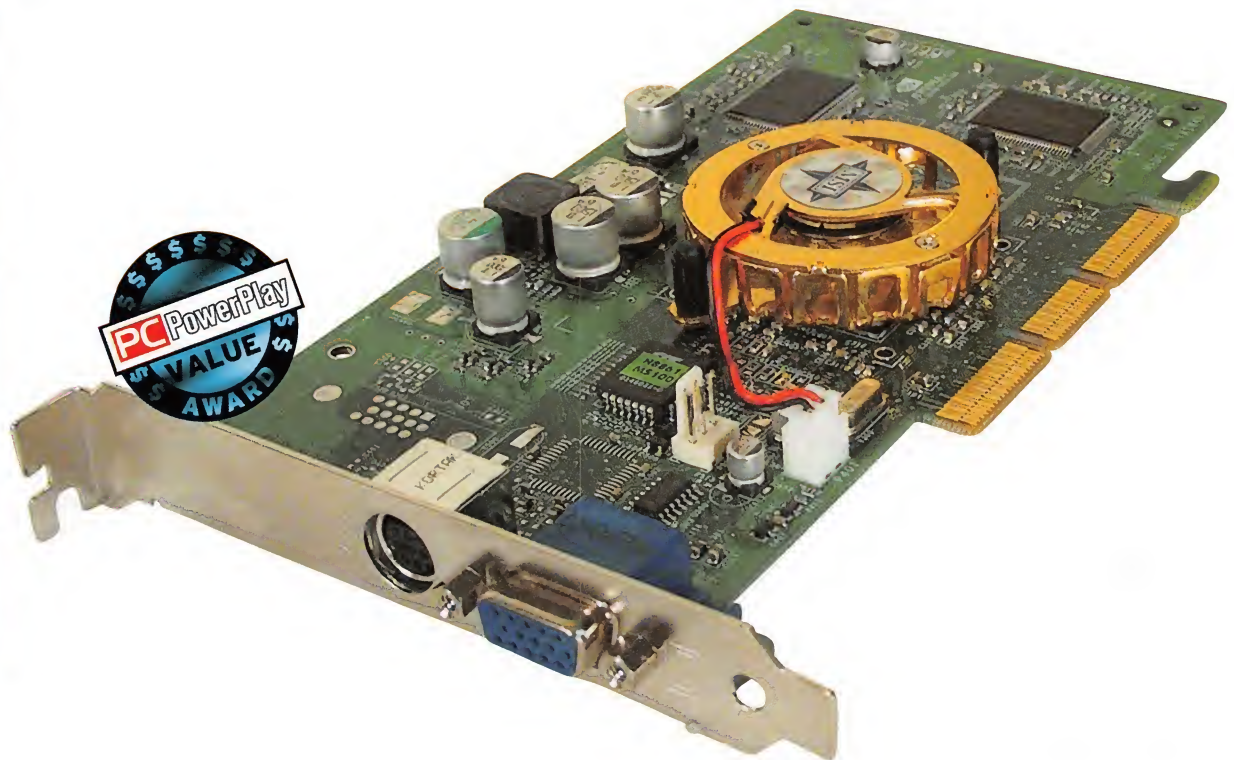
I n a fashion very different to form nVidia is releasing the GeForce 4 chipset backward with the MX chips coming first and the fully fledged GeForce 4 chips coming later. Be that as it may the card represents yet another leap in front in terms of graphics technology, effectively putting hardware 2 generations ahead of games. Built around a core clocked at 270Mhz and powered by 400Mhz DDR the card isn't the speed demon that you may expect clocking in somewhere between the GeForce3 Ti200 and the GeForce 3 but that said, it is certainly bang for your buck.

Tested on a Intel 2.2GHz system with 256Mb of DDR the G4 MX440 scored 5496 marks in 3D Mark 2001 (default), nearly 2000 marks lower than a G3 tested in the same machine. Similarly the GeForce 4 MX440 was out benched by the G3 in Dronez benchmarking scoring only moderately with and average of 25.73 FPS with 376 OpenGL Triangles per second and 380 T&L triangles per second. The G3 ran at around triple the score making for a much smoother ride overall. Finally with Serious

Sam benchmarking (1024x768) the G4 MX440 finally showed some of its potential scoring 72.7 in OpenGL as opposed to 49 for the G3. Without any extra cooling we managed to overclock the card from 270/400 to 300/480 making it bench slightly higher but it's more than fast enough at normal clock speeds to play games fine.

The numbers may not look like a big leap forward in graphics processing technology but it's what's inside that counts, and there's a whole heap of features packed into the G4 MX440. Standard to all the G4 MX cards are a 256 2D/3D graphics accelerator, integrated second generation transform and lighting engines, 32 bit colour, cube environment mapping, Digital Vibrance Control, DVD and HDTV readyMPEG-2 decoding, MPEG-2 hardware decoding with built in Motion Compensation and a whole host more that we don't have the space to mention.

Features specific to the MX 440 chipset are many and varied including; nView - a technology allowing maximum possible

flexibility in display control, LMA II - Lightspeed Memory Architecture II to increase memory bandwidth and Accuview Antialiasing - powerful antialiasing technology which promises unsurpassed performance. G4 MX440 card features include; Hardware Monitoring - monitors the status of your video card to prevent crashing and system damage and MSI Twin-Bios - the chip has a dual bios making boot failure nigh impossible.

Numbers aside the card is still in beta stages of development so there will probably be a bit of tweaking to go with both the silicon and the drivers. When a retail box version of the card becomes available you can expect big things and the suggested price tag makes it a technological leap that is well within the grasp of the average gamer. It may not be the fastest card in the pack at the moment but it's certainly fast enough to play all the games you could want and the extra feature just make it all the more sweet. MSI cards usually ship with an excellent software bundle so think of that as the cherry on top.

tech Hotware

ASUS A7N266-E
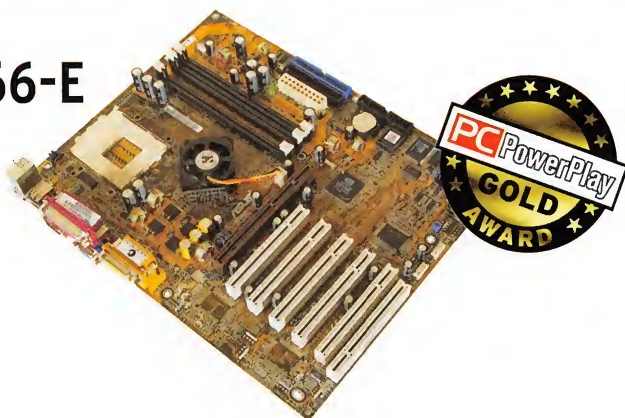
M ost integrated motherboards feature below-standard products that are almost worthless to even the most casual gamer - 8Mb S3 video, low quality sound, and other similarly useless components just serve to waste space on a gaming machine. To make it worse, these motherboards usually only feature one or two PCI slots, so you have to decide what parts you want to upgrade to quality components.

With a huge sigh of relief, we looked over the specifications of the A7N266-E. Like the other cards in the A7N266 range, it contains impressive motherboard features in combination with integrated components

that are actually worthwhile.

This latest offering from ASUS supports Athlons of speeds up to 1.9 GHz and beyond (we tested with a 1700 with no problems), the front side bus handles both 200 and 266MHz. A very respectable 5 PCI slots and 1 AGP Pro slot may all go unused when you consider what comes on the board itself.

The integrated Nvidia nForce chip contains a GeForce2 graphics core with performance roughly equivalent to a mainstream GeForce2 MX card. Couple this with the Nvidia MCP south bridge with build in Dolby Digital Encoder and you start getting the idea that this board is actually

meant to be high quality.

In the box comes an ACR daughter board with SPDIF-IN and -OUT ports to provide even better quality sound than the most common soundcards on the market. And finally, just when you think it couldn't get any better, an integrated 10/100 Mbps Ethernet controller is also present. With decent graphics, sound and networking, you're going to find it hard to think of what else to put in this machine.

Admittedly, the integrated graphics won't give you the performance of a GeForce2 Ti or the capabilities of a GeForce3, but it does allow you to go without either of these for a while longer as the performance is still quite respectable.

Performance could have been an issue, but you need not fear, because the A7N266-E performs as well as the best out there - pretty much on par with the VIA KT266A boards. Overall, a great board, with what should be a very competitive price.

RATING

DISTRIBUTOR
Achieva

PRICE
$390

URL
http://www.achieva.com.au/

OVERALL
An excellent and speedy board with all the trimmings.

SCORE
93

MSI 845 Ultra
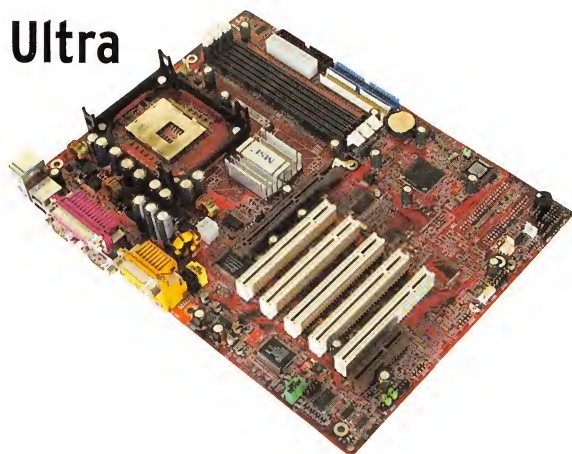
W hen the P4 first came out there was a major outcry because of the use of RAMBUS memory. We don't need to harp on about the whole RAMBUS debacle last year, but that can be put behind us, now that boards like the 845 Ultra from MSI are becoming available.

The 845 Ultra comes with all of the latest features - Socket 478, a 400MHz System Bus to keep anyone happy and full DDR SDRAM support for up to 2 gigabytes of RAM. This memory can be any combination of

200MHz and 266MHz so you don't have to worry about whether your new RAM chip is compatible with what you've already got in your machine. One oddity is the presence of 3 DIMM slots - this is unusual because the i845d chipset can only handle 4 banks of memory (2 double-sided DIMMs will do that), and Intel themselves recommend that only 2 DIMMs be present.

In addition, MSI provides optional ATA/133 support (rather than the standard ATA/100) and integrated RAID for IDE drives

- very handy if you're particularly conscious of data loss. USB 2.0 support is also a feature of the Ultra-RU variant of the motherboard, and it's good to see that this technology is finally getting proper mainboard support.

Performance-wise, the 845 Ultra is a top board for its category, but it still loses out to the existing RDRAM based boards. Most testing results in RAMBUS powered P4s edging out all DDR SDRAM comers, but with the i845d that edge has become extremely slim.

However, RDRAM boards tend to be cheaper too, so we find it hard to distinguish whether the 845 Ultra is a good buy or not. If you have a philosophical argument with RAMBUS technology being used on your motherboard like we do, then this MSI manufactured board is an excellent choice. So, we'll leave it for you to decide what you want - the raw power of RAMBUS and the sellout to big corps that goes along with it, or the purity of proper DDR SDRAM but with a higher cost and slight performance hit.

RATING

DISTRIBUTOR
MSI

PRICE
$325

URL
www.msicomputer.com.au/

OVERALL
A good solid motherboard slightly hampered by speed issues

SCORE
87

SETUP

Q&A

NATHANAEL JEANNERET SHARES HIS WISDOM

Garth got issues.

Q I recently bought a Compaq Presario 5000. It has- 128mb RAM, 20gig HDD, 8mb Integrated Intel Video, Onboard Sound (AC97) and a Celeron 1.2ghz, running on Windows XP Home. However, there are a few Problems:

1. Seeing as though my Celeron is running at a Modest 1.2ghz, I thought I would go into the Compaq's BIOS and see if I could overclock it, but I can't! There's no option whatsoever to do so, and seeing as though all modern Motherboards come with some sort of overclocking feature, I though I would be able to, but I can't! Is there any way to overclock it?

2. When I go to Display Properties, I go to the Adaptor Information, and it says that the Integrated Intel Video is only 4mb, not 8mb! Is there a way to make Windows XP recognise it as an 8mb Video Card?

3. I also bought a MuseXL that I have yet to put in. I went into the BIOS and saw that I could not disable the Onboard Sound. Is there a way I can disable the Onboard sound so I can use my MuseXL and more Importantly, get some more Available RAM, seeing as though the AC97 uses System RAM?

4. The 20gig Hard Drive is made up of 2 Hard Drives. One is 16gig and the other 3gig. Is there a way I can "merge" the Hard Drives together so I can have one 20gig Hard Drive?

Garth

A The first three problems can be taken care of from within the BIOS. Unfortunately not all modern motherboards have overclocking features. Most basic motherboards only are overclocking compatible because they are made to take several different types of CPU. You can see where I'm heading here can't you? As Compaq knows exactly what speed CPU they are intending to put in that case they can severely limit your options. With that CPU your only option would be to look for front side bus options for overclocking. Information is very thin on the ground for the actual motherboard details for proprietary systems, as mostly they don't want home users messing around with the case off. So that's the bad news part one. The reason Windows is detecting your video card as a 4Mb one is because you only have that much of your system memory shared with the AGP. On these cheesy little video cards they share your actual system memory and thusly are more poverty stricken in terms of performance than say... a monkey on valium. You can usually set the shared memory by going into the bios and adjusting the "Video Memory" option, note this is not the "AGP Aperture" which is a different kettle of fish. Okay this is part 3 of the bad news epic which has become this reply... Usually with the integrated AC97 sound it's a simple trip to the BIOS to disable, however I cannot dig up any information at all about disabling your onboard sound. If the "Disable Onboard Sound" option is missing then you are up the proverbial creek on this one. You could install the Muse anyway, but you will most likely have resource conflicts and driver issues getting games to even find your sound card.

So that's the bad news! Now the good news is yes, your HDD can be merged, although you will have to format your HDD to do this. Basically you need to boot to the prompt using a boot disk and then type in 'fdisk' you will need to delete the extended partition and the primary one, then create a new primary partition then set it as active. Then after you reboot you just need to format it (e.g format c:) Then install your OS of choice. Possibly a job you want to save up do on a rainy day.

Sound Systems with fully sik Dolby Prologix mate!

Q I am planning to upgrade my computer by replacing the motherboard, chip, ram etc. and one of the main upgrade plans are my speakers. I have a Creative Live 5.1 and I was looking the Creative speakers for it, mainly the DTT2200 which sells for around $288 and the Creative DTT3500 ($660). I was wondering is the DTT3500 worth the extra $400 odd dollars, or is it better to go for the cheaper ones. I have a DVD player that gets used quite often, and I am also an avid gamer... could you suggest one of these two, or another speaker set which would suit me?

Tom O'Reilly

A Both would be fine for all your 5.1 surround sound gaming needs, but the next model up (DTT3500) would be significantly better for watching DVD's. I think if you want a higher volume movie experience then go for the higher end speakers, but don't expect that they are as good as their component audio equivalent. As always speakers are manufactured to a price and we would suggest you ask to hear both in action if you can. For pure gaming, I wouldn't worry about spending the extra dollars.

Random Lockups

Q I have an Athlon XP1800+ on an Asus A7V266-e motherboard and have 512mb of DDR. Initially I installed Windows XP when I put the system together, but after my HDD bunged out and got replaced under warranty a second time (2 months old! It's a Fujitsu 40g- my advice would be to stay away. I'm getting a Seagate next). I decided to see how Windows 2000 ran on it, after a couple of weeks a strange thing started to happen; The PC seems to halt for a few seconds every now and again. As you will notice from this screen capture it happens quite often (the CPU time used by system is insane!). This wasn't happening with Windows XP and is the first time I've seen it happen or anything like it. I have the latest drivers for everything and standard sort of software installed like Getright, Kazaa, Nero and so on. I thought initially that it was kazaa and its supernode feature but disabling that didn't seems to help nor did closing it altogether. I was wondering if you had any tips or had seen anything like it before? Before I do a clean install and put Windows XP on or should I try dual booting to see if it's the hard drive again?
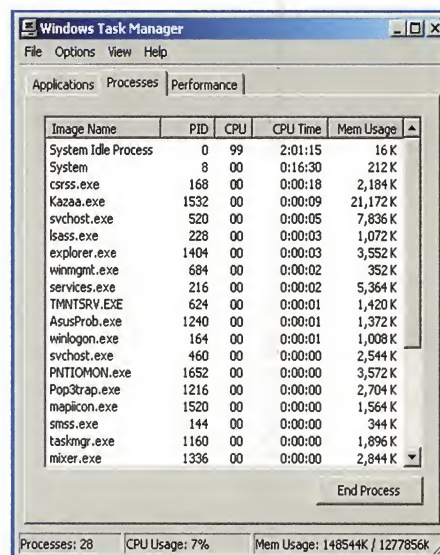
Parvez

A There are a few things that may alleviate your problem, make sure you have Hardware Acceleration turned on in the BIOS for your Video Card, this is reported as the solution in similar cases on several online forums. Make sure you also have Plug and Play OS turned on in the BIOS. Make sure you have the latest VIA 4 in 1 drivers for your A7V266-e from www.via.com.tw. Other than that there are not many differences between XP and 2K, and It would certainly be worth doing to dual boot just try and locate the problem definitely.

SETUP

Q&A
NATHANAEL JEANNERET SHARES HIS WISDOM

Hot n Steamy

Q I am in dire need for your help. I have quite a hot and steamy dilemma (not of the sexual kind.) It's my CPU. It's running at around 72 to 75 degrees while in games and around 55 to 60 degrees run idle. As you can see this is quite high and I fear that this may harm my lovely new and precious CPU. I recently downloaded a program called 'VCool' but even though this does cool my CPU some what it cause the CPU to run a lot slower and sometimes causes it to crash. Now you know my problem I was wondering if you and your wide knowledge of all things computerised, could give me some advice on what I should do. I first thought it was that the fan wasn't screwed on properly but my friend said it was alright. My computer is an AMD Athlon 1.333ghz CPU on a MSI K7T Turbo Ltd motherboard with a 4800rpm fan.

Peter

A Your problem is indeed your little CPU cooling fan. You can buy a replacement fan as a separate object if you are certain the CPU heatsink itself is sufficient. A faster fan would be the best solution I feel. For a CPU of that speed I would of expected a ~5000 rpm fan at bare minimum, or a more powerful ~7000rpm fan should get you out of the woods. Its all relevant to the actual size of the fan also, as some larger fans can get away with running at a slower speed like 4000rpm because they move so much air with their big fan blades. It's a simple matter of a phillip's head screwdriver to separate most CPU coolers from their heatsinks. Sunon and Y.S Tech manufacture quite reasonable fans that will are usually a cut above the average fan and are available relatively cheaply from your local PC store.

Autocomplete?

Q I stand before you with a question of life and death. In Internet Explorer, how do you turn auto complete on if you have turned it off?

Necron

A In IE, Go to the 'Tools' menu and down to 'Internet Options' Then to the 'Content' tab, in that window press the 'AutoComplete' button. There you can fiddle with all your AutoComplete needs.

Roller Coaster Tragedy

Q 1) I have windows XP home. How do I get Roller Coaster Tycoon to work on it? Every time I choose to run it, it just gives me a message saying that it won't work on Windows NT. I have tried using the compatibility option to get Windows to run it like it was windows 98, 95 and ME and I just get that window inviting me to send the details of my error to Microsoft. Can you help me?
2) I got a new computer recently from Dell (no complaints and great service). It is a 2Ghz Dimension 8200, which came with the soundcard as part of the motherboard. Connected to that I have an Altec-Lansing APT3 speaker set - two small speakers and a sub. Can you tell me what the advantage would be, for me, in getting an expensive sound card and speakers? Is it only surround sound? I would be using it primarily for music, but for gaming as well. That soundcard that is a box outside the computer looks REALLY good... but I don't know whether there would be any advantage.

Shane

A The Roller Coaster tycoon the man himself, Chris Sawyer (Creator of RCT and Transport Tycoon) explains the problem is to do with the way NT4 couldn't deal with Direct X 5 and DirectInput. The patch is available from http://www.rollercoastertycoon.com/test/index2.html get it now!
Oh yeah, you do get a few good things, namely volume and sound quality. If you upgrade to a better card then you will have to get the kind of speakers that reflect that quality. As we mentioned in earlier this month in letters make sure your actual BIOS lets you disable onboard sound. As mentioned, this can be a bit of a trauma. Apart from that you would also get better connectivity for things such as DVD and digital output. There would be definite advantages but only if you can actually install the sound card with little hassle.

AGP and PCIIIIIIIIIII

Q Hey just a quick question, what's the difference between AGP and PCI sockets except what they look like?

– SilentSc(+)pe

A Okay that's a good question, as we covered a while ago, AGP slots are the brown expansions slots on motherboards and that's where you plug in your super-dooper GeForce3 with added bell and whistles. PCI is the predecessor to AGP but serves a more general function. PCI (Peripheral Component Interconnect) is the standardized interconnection method and took over from ISA expansion slots (they are the black slots). They are now seen on both PC's and Macintoshes and are about as ubiquitous as the drunken journalist at a press junket. The function
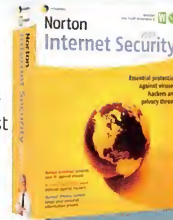
Mental Max Payne

Q My computer has the following; AMD Athlon 1.2Ghz processor, an ASUS GeForce 2 MX 400 card, 512mb of RAM and an ASUS A75V133 Motherboard. The OS is Windows XP Professional. Several months ago I bought Max Payne, which ran perfectly up until two weeks ago. Subsequent to downloading a Windows XP update the game stopped working. I don't know whether this could be part of the problem. Anyway, upon launching the game, before the setup screen appears and the actual game starts up, an error message pops up reading: Max Payne requires a Direct X 8 compatible display adapter. Please consult the troubleshooting readme in the installation folder. Having referred to the troubleshooting guide and reinstalling the game I am still confronted by the error message. My video card is running current drivers, and I do have Direct X 8, but the problem prevails. Please help me get back to playing Max Payne!

Nick

A Microsoft has actually been kind enough to add the ability to remove the patches after they have been installed. Yay for that! Just go into add/remove programs and go down the latest 'Windows XP Hotfix' and yea verily I say unto thee, your problem shall be clobbered with the Microsoft Stick of Uninstallage +15! Sorry folks, but after the nightmare of not being able to uninstall various Windows updates, this almost a revolution! This is a fantastic thing, as we often get harassed by little reminders so that we bother to install things, its nice to be able to get rid of them when they bugger up our systems.

SETUP

Q&A

NATHANAEL JEANNERET SHARES HIS WISDOM

of the AGP slot is to give your Video Card a direct route to the CPU and system resources. The reason for this is simple, video cards got faster and the restrictive PCI bus was still travelling along at a slowpokish 1/3 of the system bus speed. With AGP the information now travels at 2/3s of the system bus speed. This is became important as time went on as Video cards were capable of processing vast amounts of data quickly and these days host a similar number of transistors per die (the processing unit of the video card) as your system CPU. AGP offers a dedicated pipeline to your actual system memory and also super speedy internal transfer rates.
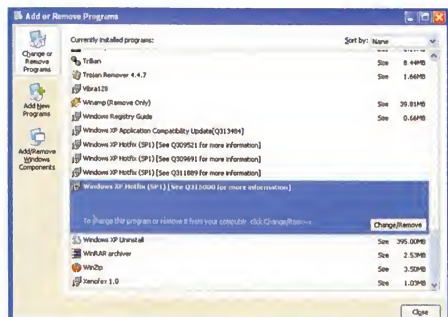
My precious megabytes....

Q I will be upgrading my computer soon (this includes upgrading my hard disk) but I have one problem. I have about 200 MB of files that I want to keep. Most of these files are too large to fit onto a floppy disk and I don't have a CD burner or a zip drive. With my slow Internet connection, it would take decades for me to upload them to one of those storage sites and download them back. At the moment, I have a 13 GB HDD. I want to have 30 GB of space.
What do you think is the cheapest and easiest solution? Should I just buy a 17GB hard drive and make that the slave?

Howard

A Well that's a tricky one, and I think you would be among the many gamers who have been in a similar situation (myself included). If you grab a cheap burner you will be able to archive files for next to nix, given that a blank CD-R goes for about 50 cents these days. If you don't think you can afford to do that, then get the HDD but I think you will find yourself in a similar situation another few months down the track...

Laptop Video Cards.

Q I just got a laptop recently and the video card has only got 8 Mb memory, so I was wondering if I could hook up a new card with at least 16 Mb to the laptop, via the monitor port at the back or something.

barkoder

A response we have received in the tech letters inbox and with some trepidation I have tried to decipher it and bring it to Australia's beleaguered broadband gaming community. In short, Blubke is spot on with his reference the Telstra heartbeat. And he is also spot on with the fact that surely cable users don't need a ping to say that they are still there as they are connected whenever the PC is on. Telstra introduced the 'heartbeat' as a method of gathering statistics of what the BigPond customers were getting up to, in a round about kind of way. And so as a result if you have a firewall enabled the heartbeat doesn't get through, Telstra's computers register that there is nothing at the end of the connection and close the connection. The ozcableguy has been kind enough to put together a Q&A session on this and it can be located at http://ozcableguy.com/heartbeat.html hurrah for him, he does good work!

Cursed Report to Microsoft function

Q I am starting to suffer withdrawal symptoms. I just purchased my new computer, an Athlon 1600+, it came with Windows XP and a TNT2 32MB graphics card, 256pc133 RAM and Bio-Star main board I have enjoyed the speed. But the problem is this new fanged internet option of sending Microsoft your problems. You know the little box that comes up saying 'such and such a program has caused some error or another and will now close'. Do you wish to send Microsoft the description of this problem? So far I have not, it has been acting up on mostly my Tomb Raider collection, which is annoying knowing I spent all that money and can only play one of the four that I have. Then I began to worry when Half-Life wouldn't install. I had to burn the installed version on our family computer to play it on my own PC. Total Annihilation has stuck at the eighth level in the Arm campaign, It just boots me back into windows.

Simon

A The report to Microsoft thing is extremely annoying, but it looks like it doesn't contain too much in the way of critical data about the task that it is processing. Microsoft say that they will

not and cannot use this information for any other purpose other than fixing the problem itself. This being said, it takes time to make the report and who wants that extra little bit of personal information floating away into the ether? Not me that's for sure! Turning it off is actually quite easy, Go to the 'Control Panel' then to 'System' choose the 'Advanced' tab and press the 'error reporting' button. Here you can turn it off wholesale, or leave it on for some of your programs. I would suggest have it set to disabled for Programs, but enabled for Windows operating system.
We are getting varied reports on how well Windows XP works and in some cases doesn't work with games. Bear in mind that it is an evolution of the Windows 2000 core and if the game used to work under Windows 2000 then it should work under XP. Games that don't work under XP are most likely titles that are not working under 2000. In a lot of cases if you do your research, game publishers are taking a hard line stance and not releasing patches for older games, simply stating that they may or may not work under XP but that's not their responsibility. This is not good, and it seems like the best way to deal with this is to have a multi-boot system. Not the easiest solution and certainly not the solution for all gamers. It seems that lacklustre hardware support has finally been replaced with lacklustre software support!

SETUP

Q&A
NATHANAEL JEANNERET SHARES HIS WISDOM

PCI Video Cards

Q Is there such thing as a PCI Hercules Prophet 3D? If so where can I get one? Not online preferably.

FoXnOmAn

A Well, plenty of online stores sell them, you can get the full list from http://au.hercules.com/wheretobuy/index.php but you can also purchase them from Dick Smith, Electronics Boutique and Harvey Norman. You tend to pay more for the PCI equivalent of AGP cards due to the fact that the companies that manufacturer them, sell less of these due to reasonably low demand. The model in the Hercules line you are looking at is the Hercules 3D Prophet 4000XT - PCI. There are various TNT2M64 based cards floating around in the market at the moment, but the performance is... somewhat lacking; go for the Hercules if you can afford it.

Medal of Honour Pain

Q I have been waiting for Medal of Honour to come out for about six months. I have been going to the local shop to look for it every day to see if it has come out yet to no avail, until today. I saw it sitting on the shelf and just had to have it. I wasn't gonna wait till the price dropped, no way! I had to have it then. (You know how it is). I came home and installed it as quickly as possible so I could get on with kickin' NAZI butt, but I struck a problem. I recently bought the multi-player demo and just as I was about to play the demo, a dialogue box comes up and says that I need a video card that can handle multi-texturing. I just thought that it must have been the demo so I would wait till the real McCoy / full version came out. This also unfortunately happens in the real game as well. First question- What is multi-texturing? Second question is it true that my video card can't handle multi-texturing? My system contains- A PIII 866MHz Processor, 576 Mb PC133 SDRam, Asus CUSI-M Skt370 SIS MicroATX Mother Board which is a 3-in-1 or something and has a shared Ram Video Card (Sis 630). Can you please help, as I am just a humble Australian out to kill a few pixels!

Nick

A Folks, we all know that all-in-one hardware is my pet peeve, and today we see yet another example of poor unsuspecting gamers getting lumped with crap video. Yep, you guessed it, you really need a new motherboard, and standalone video card. I don't imagine your 3D performance is up to scratch also, replace that horrible all-in-one motherboard!

Multi-texturing relies on an onboard texture processing unit, (for example nVidia's shading rasterizer.) which processes multiple visual effects in one pass. Instead of rendering an image with lighting, and then the texture, and then possibly the bump map, multi-texturing allows this all to be done with one pass. This increases the sheer fill-rate speed your video card is capable of. The SIS 630 is listed as a fully direct X 6.0 compliant card, and multitexturing is built in from that version of Direct X 6.0 and onwards. The last resort is to try running it in OpenGL mode if that is an option as that also has Multi-texturing.
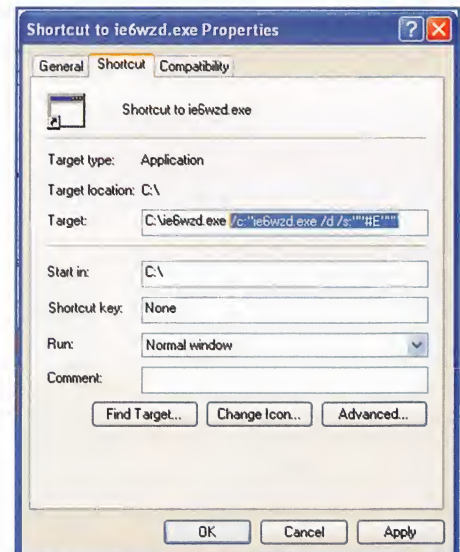
TECH TIP # 1

GETTING RID OF ONBOARD VIDEO AND SOUND.

As we see time and time again in tech letters, people with All-in-one motherboards suffer under slow video performance, drop-outs on the Net, and of course CPU intensive, low performance sound cards! Sounds great eh? I'll buy 2! The next logical step is to replace the motherboard and get some decent hardware right? Well, in some cases this is sometimes not financially viable and those of us working on systems with integrated hardware are sometimes forced to upgrade their systems individually. Within the BIOS you can easily disable these onboard features most of the time. Just by selecting disable onboard video/sound you can purge your system of this poxy hardware. You can put in PCI equivalents of some lower end video cards, but the performance of these cards is impeded by the relatively slow speed of the PCI bus. For a cheap upgrade, an all-in-one motherboard like the nForce looks like good value, but just don't be surprised if you are stuck in the same spot in six months.

THE BEAST

THE MOST POWERFUL GAMING PC GOOD MONEY CAN BUY

We made the Beast so good last month that there was little to change. A new cooler may not seem like a lot but think of it this way – with such excellent cooling the clock speed of the CPU can be cranked to previously unseen hights. WOOHOO. Long live the Beast.

CPU, MEMORY AND MOTHERBOARD

AMD Athlon XP 2000+
So fast it can process data before you even ask, that's how fast it is, and cheap too.
$750 www.amd.com
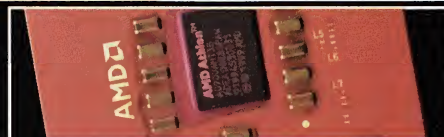
MSI K7T266PRO2-RU
Three months on from the review and the thing is still on top as far as AMD CPU motherboards goes. It's red, so it must go faster.
$350 www.msicomputer.com.au
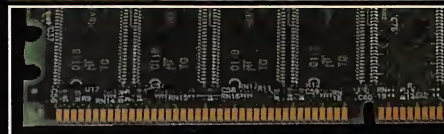
512MB Odin 300MHz RAM
What's so special about this RAM? Well, it operates at 300MHz, faster than any other DDR RAM on the market, that's what.
$450 www.3dpower.com

Thermaltake Volcano 7
Cold as hell and smart enough to know how cold to make it
$57 www.anyware.com.au

Topower 420w PSU
Gold in look, gold in performance.
$182 www.techbuy.com.au

VIDEO SUBSYSTEM AND AUDIO

Absolute Morpheus GeForce3 Ti500
Fast and stupidly powerful, just like we like them. And it comes in a wooden box for extra coolness.
$823 www.techbuy.com.au

Creative Audigy Platinum XP
Still the best, most powerful soundcard imaginable. It's going to be a while before Creative is kicked off the top of the sound card pile.
$599 www.creative.com.au

Boston Acoustics Digital Theatre 6000
Combined with the Audigy you've got yourself a high end stereo in your PC.
$1399 www.bostonaccoustics.com

Sony MDR-F1 Headphones
The gold plated Rolls Royce of headphones, powerful, sexy and oh so comfortable.
$649 www.sony.com.au

LATEST ADDITION

Thermaltake Volcano 7
www.anyware.com.au
$57

OK, so this month the new addition to the Beast is a cooler. Trust us, though it may be small it is a very worthwhile addition. Why? So you can overclock the hell out of your processor, that's why.

STORAGE AND OPTICAL

Acer 24x10x40 CD-RW
It does everything and can make those valuable "off site backups" at 24x.
$249 www.techbuy.com.au

Panasonic SR-8586 B 16x DVD-ROM
Smooth and fast. It'll read DVD-RAM and play the latest new release. Good and stable and not too expensive.
$180 www.panasonic.com.au
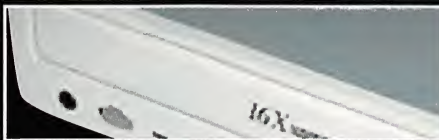
Seagate Cheetah 73LP 73 GB HDD
Hellishly expensive but at 10000 rpm the fastest big drive around. Can mean the difference between life and death in lag.
$1980 www.seagate.com

Panasonic 3.5" Floppy
They may be retro but they're still handy.
$25 www.gamedude.com.au

Adaptec 29160 SCSI
A good solid SCSI for a big fast HDD.
$529 www.adaptec.com

PHYSICALITY AND INPUT

Diamondtron 2060u 22" Monitor
It's larger than life, crisp and has a beautifully short tube.
$2099 www.mitsubishi-electric.com.au

Lian Li PC-60 ATX Aluminium Case
So sexy it hurts. Solid, smooth and full of space. It's been on the Beast for a while and will stay for a while yet.
$396 www.anyware.com.au
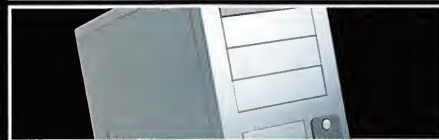
Microsoft Internet Keyboard
Looks slick and can keep the WASD action going all day. A great performer for twice the price.
$49 www.gamedude.com.au

Logitech Mouseman Dual Optical
The best gaming mouse on the market bar none. So accurate it hurts.
$99.95 www.logitech.com

Microsoft Sidewinder Force-Feedback
Great feeling stick with real bite.
$199 www.microsoft.com

Logitech Momo Force
The swankiest racing wheel on the market bar none.
$499 www.logitech.com

TOTAL BEAST VALUE:
$12000

B E A S T I E
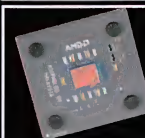
Athlon XP 1600
So fast it you might miss it but at a price you can't ignore.
$279

512Mb Kingston DDR RAM
Half a gig of DDR. Oh baby!
$265

MSI K7N420 Pro
It's solid, fast supports DDR and has a built in GeForce 2. What more could you want
$363
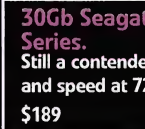
30Gb Seagate Barracuda Series.
Still a contender for size, stability and speed at 7200 rpm.
$189

Sony 16x DVD ROM
Why have CD when you can have DVD?
$129
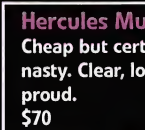
Hercules Muse XL
Cheap but certainly not nasty. Clear, loud and proud.
$70

Hercules MuseXL
Budget soundcard, but supports EAX2.0 and it's loud!
$70
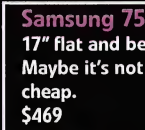
Samsung 753DF
17" flat and beautiful. Maybe it's not 21", but it's cheap.
$469

AOpen HQ45 PRO
Sound and USB ports on face, PSU and great style combined with excellent price and ample elbow room make this on a winner.$132
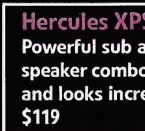
Hercules XPS 210
Powerful sub and satellite speaker combo sound great and looks incredibly swanky.
$119

TOTAL BEASTIE VALUE
$2000

MODLife
GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR GAMES

Quake 3 Generations
No, it has nothing to do with Star Trek

Though it is still only relatively new and certainly in Beta stage development, Generations Quake is set to become a truly superb mod. The premise of the mod is very simple, take all of the best elements of all previously released id games and port them into Quake 3. What you get is a superb FPS featuring weapons, characters and powers from all 3 Quake games, the Doom series and Wolfenstein. The porting is seamless, mixing elements of all the games with a casual grace that makes it look like a truly professional offering.

To facilitate the mixing of characters, Generations uses a character class based system, allowing players to choose from 5 different classes, all of which have their own weapon and play scheme.

Earth Soldiers - the guys from Wolfenstein. Though they may look like the softest of all characters they have the definite distinction of having the dual chaingun, fully capable of mowing down enemies like they were Nazi pig dogs, the only flame thrower in the game and a sniper rifle more than comparable to the Q3 rail gun.

Doom Warriors - The fastest class, obviously from Doom can run into a room, kill you and leave before you know what hit you. They also carry the venerable chainsaw and the bigass BFG9000 for heavy duty bang-bang.

Slipgaters - fast moving guys with rocket launchers and excellent armour (if you can find some). Slipgaters are great for bouncy and/or run and gun style players. They're fast enough to (hopefully) keep you alive and hit hard enough to rack up a good frag count.

Strogg Soldiers - by far the slowest of the different classes, Strogg Soldiers have far more armour than any other class and the biggest weapon of all, the deadly BFG10k. They can certainly dish out the damage but you can be sure that you will receive a great deal in return.

Arena Gladiators - all rounders with no real strengths or weaknesses. It may be a bit of a hefty download, racking up to around 100Mb but Quake 3 Generations is definitely a keeper. You'll get hours of fun either reminiscing about the days of yore when the Doom Trooper was the be all and end all of bad-asses or just trying to blow his head off. Give it a go, you won't regret it.

"I've fallen and I can't get up..."

Freedom Force Skins
New game, old heroes

Although the game hasn't been released as yet and doesn't look set to be on the shelves for another few months, Freedom Force has already taken the gaming world by storm spawning a huge number of fan sites. Irrational Games, designers of Freedom Force have already released some of the different meshes and models of the characters in the game, allowing fans to create skins and meshes for their own favourite heroes, both from comics and their own imagination.

Although the game has not been released as yet so we can't see the skins and meshes in action, the work looks absolutely amazing. Web sites such as www/freedomforcecenter.com have literally hundreds of new skins for you to download when the game arrives. These range from the great old standbys such as Superman and Batman to some definitely more eclectic choices such as President John F. Kennedy to Mike Allreds Madman and somebody composed entirely out of wire-frame and black dots.

If you can't find your favourite hero online you can always go the Freedom Force homepage at http://www.myfreedomforce.com/downlo ads/index.html, grab a few of the meshes available and start skinning them yourselves. They don't have to be professional looking and they don't have to be based on characters from comics, TV or movies. Just go crazy New York style and skin until your heart's content.

""Look at my bulging six pack"

Ex-PowerPlay staffers along with a group of dedicated swell guys cohorts have begun work on what could be the greatest ever mod for the greatest ever game, Deus Ex. Work has only just begun so we won't be seeing anything resembling a finished product any time soon but you can expect big things. We do.

Set some time after the events portrayed in Deus Ex and taking place in good old Sydney the mod looks like it will be an entirely new story arc which has been described as "System Shock meets Half Life". If there's two games we here at PowerPlay talk about (other than Deus Ex of course) it's System Shock and Half Life. We're not going to spoil the story for you but it involves rogue AI, illegal surveillance, double agents, human/computer hybrids and a killer plague. What more could you want?

For: Deus Ex
Version: N/A
URL: N/A

Skull Hunters
Get some head!

N o review could ever live up to that tag line but here goes anyway. Skull Hunters is a slightly modified version of the old Quake 2 mod Headhunters in which points are scored by collecting the severed heads of downed enemies. The game runs something like this - when you kill an enemy a floating, glowing skull appears. Running over the skull causes it to slowly rotate around your character. Skulls need to be traded in at

Collect heads and be the greatest

shrines to score points. Ambitious play is rewarded through an exponentially growing points system - 1 skull is worth 1 frag, 2 skulls are worth 3 frags, 3 skulls are worth 6 frags and 4 skulls are worth 10 frags. Basically the longer you wait before you cash in the more points you stand to score.

Of course this does not always work. When you are killed any skulls you may have been carrying remain at the scene of your death so you better get back there quick smart before any other player cashes in. Apart from the whole disembodied floating skull thing there are few other graphical differences between Heretic 2 deathmatch and Skull Hunters.

If you're getting sick of the usual multiplayer shenanigans in Quake 3 or Unreal Tournament you might want to give this one a go. The third person perspective may take a little getting used to but pretty soon you'll be giving and getting head with the best of them.

D-Day Normandy
Biff the Bosh and Hammer the Hun Quake 2 style

I t's time to take a step back into the past, both with games and in actual history. D-Day Normandy brings us an excellent representation of WWII combat using the ageing but still quite powerful Quake II engine. It may look a little dated in the graphics department but it really is time to knock the dust off the old Quake 2 CD and reinstall because D-Day Normandy delivers in terms of overall gameplay and the number of goodies included in the mod.

The first thing you may notice about the game is the truly huge amount of classes available on both the Axis and Allies sides. Both teams are comprised of the following classes:

Infantry - The basic all round soldier;
Officers - Well armed with SMG and capable of calling in air strikes;
Light Gunners - Equipped with LMG and grenades;
Heavy Gunners - Slow moving but equipped with a heavy MG;

Airborne - Fast and well provisioned for guerilla combat with an SMG and a knife;
Snipers - Equipped with a powerful and accurate rifle for picking off the enemy;
Medics - Armed with only a knife the Medic can heal other troops with morphine;
Engineers - Slow moving but has the advantage of a rocket launcher; and
Flamethrower - Once again slow moving but the flamethrower excels in killing.

Each of the classes is well balanced for overall gameplay so both teams can count on an level playfield when battling it out. Animations are simple but effective though some of the new weapon skins could do with a little work, especially the respective rocket launchers.

Though it is basically a PvP style deathmatch mod the mechanics of the campaign are novel and excellent. The progression of maps depends entirely on who won the round. The first map is Omaha Beach upon which the Allies must secure a stronghold. Naturally the Axis must stop the.

If the allies are successful the next map loaded is Sainte Mere Eglise which entails the Allies and Axis simply fighting it out for superiority. If the Allies win they progress to the next map and so on and so forth. This approach gives a good epic feel to the gameplay and gives the definite impression that your actions in the game are effecting the outcome, not simply racking up frags.

D-Day Normandy is an excellent teamplay mod only slightly hampered by dated looking graphics. If you can put that bias aside you are in for a great time kicking Nazi butt.

Nazis Nazis everywhere

Assaulted Empire
Kingons on the starboard bow

After the war with the Dominion ended there was peace in the Alpha Quadrant. Ships could once again travel safe in the knowledge that the Federation would be the only power patrolling the spaceways and they would be free from harm and threats from violent factions...or so they thought. A rogue faction of Klingon warriors broke away from the main Klingon Empire, declaring bloody war against the Federation and anyone held within their sway. Capable of fielding a fleet of around 200 ships and willing to fight to the bloody end this new rebel faction of Klingons threatens to once again bring the quadrant to the brink of destruction.

Luckily the Federation has not been caught unawares. A new combat class of starship was being developed to fight against the Dominion and though it wasn't finished in time for that war its arrival could mean the difference between life and death for the men, women and non-gender specific entities of the Federation. You play Lt. O'Brien, Chief Security Officer onboard one of the new combat ships, the USS Atlantic and you've just landed at the Klingon outpost of "unpronounceable guttural sounding name".

If you're a fanboy of Star Trek, and let's face it, who playing ST: Elite Forces isn't, you will dig this mod. You can shoot things with phasers, crawl through Jeffries tubes, beam up a security escort to take a prisoner into custody and do all kinds of other hoopy Trek stuff. Now if only you could play Kirk - undoubtedly the best Captain...

"Captain's Log: I am a boring individual"

NALI CHRONICLES

In the dark Third Age of Suffering a town previously free from the onslaught of demons that has plagued the rest of the land, suddenly becomes a target for their diabolic attacks. A young Nali mage must stop the evil and in the process fulfil a prophecy laid down years before. So goes the back-story (or what has been released thereof) of the Nali Chronicles, an epic fantasy themed single player total conversion mod for Unreal. Nearly everything in the mod has been changed from the original - new HUD, new weapons and monsters. Most impressive is the spell system which replaces the standard alternate fire mode of the game. Throughout the different levels the player can find new and more powerful spells to throw at enemies for the cost of Mana. There's no official release date posted for the mod as yet as they seem to be having a little trouble with lack of staff but with any luck it should be finished in a few months.

FOR: Unreal
VERSION: TBA
URL: www.planetunreal.com/nalichronicles

Pearman
What the f@#k happened to that guys head?

OK, Pearman goes something like this. There's this guy and he's made out of fruit. He's Pearman. His head is a pear. He has weapons like the pear launcher. It shoots pears. The world is inhabited by a number of other pear people as well as some other characters, including a fly, a giant land fish and a fruit based mermaid. In multiplayer these characters run around and frag each other. In single player something else happens.

You'll have to forgive the obtuse nature of this review as we're still trying to come to terms with what's on our screens. We're pretty certain that it's a game and that you can play it but as to whether it's good or bad we are not sufficiently medicated to judge. Anyway, let's have a look at the mod in more detail.

The new skins and graphics are quite outstanding. The pear people look great whether they be dressed in overalls or a kilt, wielding a pear laucher or a nail gun.

Likewise the maps and landscapes are beautifully detailed and fun to play on. Animations are smooth and professional looking which is lucky because a poorly animated pear person is a sight worse than seeing Mal Colston naked and covered in baby oil - or so we've heard.

All of the weapons have been changed from Unreal so now you can equip your mighty fruit headed warrior with such fearsome implements of destruction as:

The Pearlauncher - capable of launching high explosive bouncing pears over a long distance as well as being able to shoot a pear puree.

Lawn Darts - you can either throw the darts or stab people with them, not that we would ever suggest that darts should be used in such a violent and un-sportsman like manner.

Spudgun - this ain't your daddy's spud gun, no sir. This baby can fire potatoes like nobodies business.

Nail & Glue Gun - can shoot nails, and glue.

Good for all your carpentry needs.

BB Rifle - be careful young man, you can put your eye out with that thing.

There are some others but talking about produce related death is becoming a little too all consuming a passion(fruit). Suffice it to say that Pearman is a deeply odd but surprisingly satisfying Unreal mod. It may not be quite as weird as the Half Life Yoda mod, but it comes real close.

Fish heads, Fish heads, smelly, smelly...

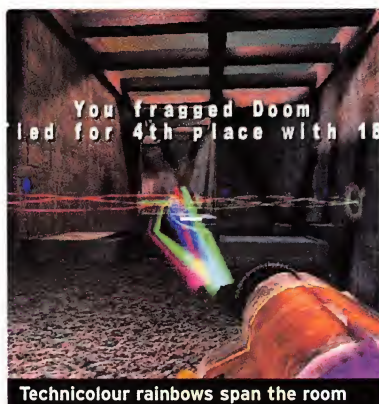# Corkscrew Quake 3
Not to be used for opening bottles

5/5

For such a tiny mod (around 1Mb), Corkscrew sure packs in the features. Combining elements of Instagib, Headhunters, Excessive Overkill, new graphics, new sound and a new HUD, Corkscrew is fun for the whole family for a whole lot of reasons. Instagib has become a very popular form of play and it's easy to see why - the ability to kill an opponent in one shot makes for a very fast and furious game but also a very tactical one, ensuring that players think before they run and gun.

Corkscrew one ups this style of play by allowing shots to bank off walls so it's possible to shoot an enemy who's hiding around a corner or skulking in a hard to get area. This means that you need to be careful to plan your tactics - it you keep to the same route all of the time other players will start picking you to pieces from an unassailable position. Disembowelling campers by taking advantage of the rail bounce is an excellent anti-camping feature. If a player hangs around in one spot for too long they will be warned to move. Stay any longer and they will be gibbed by the Vadrigar.

Other features of this neat little mod include a modified HUD, new rail graphics, a corkscrew style rail trail (hence the name), hit location scoring, an off-hand grapple, more powerups, rail jumping (like rocket jumping), Headhunter style gaming and more. It's a whole lot of fun packed into a small mod so give it a try. It won't disappoint.

Technicolour rainbows span the room

Navy Seals is another realistic modern warfare mod, a la Counter Strike. Using a seriously tweaked Quake 3 Arena engine. The mod will contain a whole heap of features sure to keep all of you out there with a serious jones for modern combat games happy, such as; realistic weapons, realistic physics, damage locations, bleeding, radio command systems, new movement types, weapon accessories and useable tools. Of course there will be other features but we'll have to wait until the mod is released to find out what the final code holds in store. The work so far looks incredible with some excellent character and weapon skins. If the rest of the work keeps up to this very high standard it may be another of the new crop of games that may well give Counter Strike a run for its money.

Conundrum
A question wrapped in an enigma wrapped in a puzzle

4/5

Once again Gordon Freeman is in a quandary. Hours after the events of Half Life, Gordon finds himself still stuck in the other world, Xen. The Nihilanth is dead but his rations are running out and some of the more aggressive beasties are looking at him sideways, wondering what the other other white meat may taste like. Running for his life, Gordon spies a room full of glowing teleporters and, with nothing left to lose, hurls himself into one at random.

As luck would have it, it sends him back to the Black Mesa facility, flinging him into a room full of screaming scientists. The scientists are afraid of the military patrols still blockading the facility. Bravely Gordon heads off to meet the foe face to face once again. During his travels he finds a room filled with what seems to be a miniature of an Egyptian landscape. Before he can scratch his head and mutter, "what the hell is that" the walls begin to shake...

Conundrum for Half Life sends our hero,

Gordon Freeman on another perilous mission, this time fighting his way through the Black Mesa Facility, an Egyptian landscape and a number of puzzle/trap levels. Though combat has its place in the mod it is far more weighted towards thinking, tactics and puzzle solving. More of a map pack than anything else, Conundrum doesn't feature many tweaks to the game overall apart from the removal of a few weapons. Pickups are few and far between so you have to be careful with your health and your ammo - no blasting everything that looks at you sideways.

The homepage of the mod states very openly that it may take you hours to work your way through a map - and you won't even see a beastie during that time. Some may find this frustrating, but if you're looking for a change of pace from run and gun or even more tactical shooting you should definitely give Conundrum a try. The maps are all very proficient and well put together with far more in common with

platformers and puzzle games than your standard FPS.

Conundrum is slow going, don't let anybody tell you otherwise but it is no less fun for that. Take a weekend, load it up and try to wrap your mind around the different routes. It's a very worthwhile experience.

Let me think about this...

PCPP#72 introduces some new changes. For starters you've got a new CD Producer - me - and, secondly, we've also launched our DVD edition. See the DVD editorial for details. For those of you who bought the CD edition of the mag, I don't think you'll be disappointed. There's a brand new HTML interface and a whole bunch of new sections that cover most bases and should keep you busy for some time.

CD01 is now exclusively dedicated to game demos in order to fit as many as possible onto it. Awesome new demos include Capatalism II, Disciples II and IL-2 Sturmovik (new demo).

CD02 features a whole variety of software sections. As well as the essential browser updates there are also dedicated sections for mods, patches, audio/MP3, utilities and drivers. Some of these sections should be treated as archives and will reflect any updates that become available. **Paul Noone**

CD01 - Demos

WIZARDRY 8
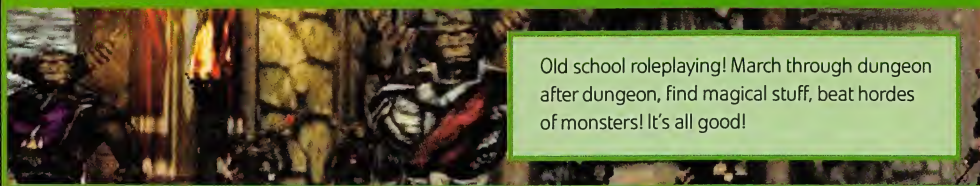
Old school roleplaying! March through dungeon after dungeon, find magical stuff, beat hordes of monsters! It's all good!

Requires
Pentium 3 450Mhz, 64Mb RAM, 300Mb free hard drive space, 16Mb Videocard, installation of DirectX8 (included). GeForce2 recommended

STRIFESHADOW

An RTS with a big scary difference. Set in a hellish nightmare landscape, full of crazy units and tasty gameplay.

Requires
Pentium 2 350Mhz, 64Mb RAM, 150Mb free hard drive space, 8Mb Videocard, installation of DirectX8 (included). 16Mb video recommended

SAFARI BIATHLON
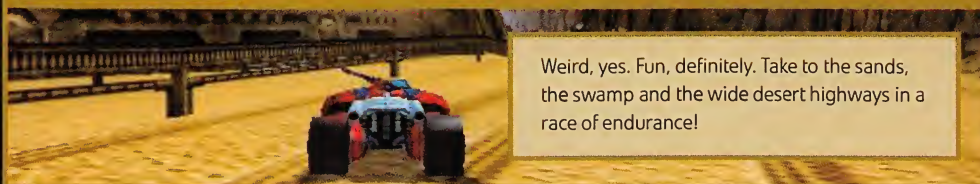
Weird, yes. Fun, definitely. Take to the sands, the swamp and the wide desert highways in a race of endurance!

Requires
Pentium 3 450Mhz, 64Mb RAM, 200Mb free hard drive space,16Mb Videocard, installation of DirectX8 (included). GeForce2 recommended
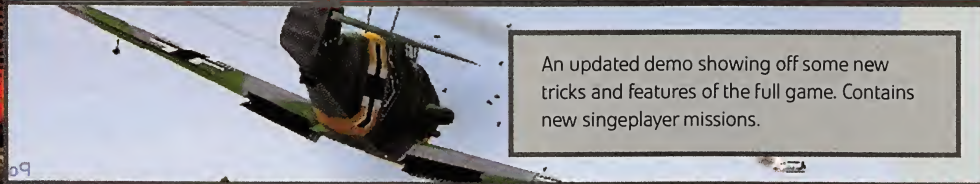
DISCIPLES II

HOMM3 on growth hormones. Just the thing to tide you over until HOMM4 is finally released. Come on guys!

Requires
Pentium 2 350Mhz, 64Mb RAM, 150Mb free hard drive space, 8Mb Videocard, installation of DirectX8 (included). 16Mb video recommended

STURMOVIK - New Demo

An updated demo showing off some new tricks and features of the full game. Contains new singeplayer missions.

Requires
Pentium 3 450Mhz, 64Mb RAM, 250Mb free hard drive space, 16Mb Videocard, installation of DirectX8 (included). 32Mb video recommended

CAPITALISM II

Destroy the world! Or at least, destroy Wall St. Why? It's as David Wenham said: "I just hate banks."

Requires
Pentium 2 350Mhz, 64Mb RAM, 150Mb free hard drive space, 8Mb Videocard, installation of DirectX8 (included). 16Mb video recommended

CDs

CD02 - Mods & Utils

MOD LIFE 072

D-DAY Normandy

Slink through blasted villages and get the drop on your mates dogface style in this high-action, WW2 styled mod for Quake3.

Requires full registered Quake3 to play

Generations Arena

Another awesome Quake3 mod that changes all elements of gameplay. New modes, new weapons, new arenas - it's a new Generation!

Requires full registered Quake3 v1.31 to play

Assaulted Empire

A new singleplayer campaign for Star Trek: Elite force, discover what happens after the Dominion Wars. Full voice acting included.

Requires full registered Elite Force to play

Conundrum

A different kind of singleplayer campaign for Half-Life. It's not just about running-and-gunning, quite a bit of lateral thought will be needed to win.

Requires full registered Half-Life to play

Skull Hunters

Dig out your old copy of Heretic II and fire up this tasty little mod for some crazy deathmatch multiplayer action.

Requires full registered Heretic II to play

Quake 3 Corkscrew

Are you a Rail Whore? Is a frag not a frag unless it's taken from half a map away with one flick of the wrist? Then this mod is definitely for you

Requires full registered Quake3 v1.31 to play

Pearman

A completely insane Unreal Tournament Total Conversion involving, well, pears. What's it about? We have absolutely no idea. Play it and see.
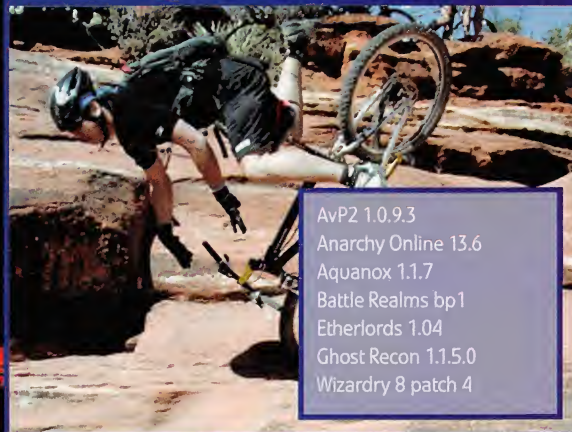
Requires full registered Unreal Tournament to play

SYSTEM
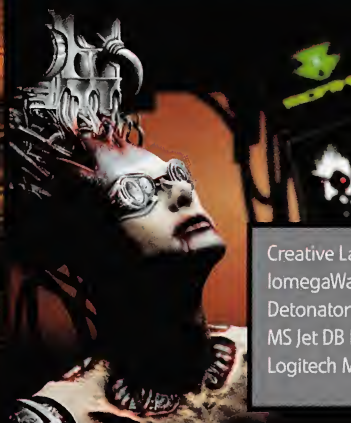
Creative Labs SB Drivers
IomegaWare Tools 3.1
Detonator XP 23.11
MS Jet DB Engine 3.5.1
Logitech Mouse 9.41.2

PATCHES

AvP2 1.0.9.3
Anarchy Online 13.6
Aquanox 1.1.7
Battle Realms bp1
Etherlords 1.04
Ghost Recon 1.1.5.0
Wizardry 8 patch 4

UTILITIES

Adobe Acrobat Reader 5.05
DirectX 8.1
GetRight 4.5c
HyperSnap 4.20.0.0
SANDRA+ 2002 8.59f
StuffIt 7.0
WinRAR 2.90
Winzip 8.1
ZoneAlarm 2.6.362

Welcome to DVD

If your magazine has the Dungeon Siege cover and DVD on the front then this section is for you. If not, then please skip to the CD Editorial. If you want to subscribe to DVD Powerplay, or are a subscriber who wants to change their subscription from CD to DVD, call this toll free number now – 1300 36 11 46 (Mon–Fri 9-5 EST).

Welcome to DVD Powerplay. This DVD contains more software than any sane person could get through in a year, let alone a single month. In fact I almost went mad just trying to download it all! If not for the help of ROM and the PC Powerplay team this enormous undertaking would never have been possible.

The DVD, for the short term at least, comprises the complete contents of both Powerplay CDs, as well as all the extra files exclusive to DVD Powerplay.
- Paul Noone

INSTRUCTIONS

The majority of the files on this disk are compressed and will require an appropriate extraction utility in order to open them. Winzip, as well as many other helpful tools, are located in the Utilities section of the CD2 link.

We cannot offer opinions or support for the software included on this DVD but should you have any legitimate enquiries about the DVD's functionality you may send an email to - cdgod@next.com.au.

Welcome to DVD, but be warned: this is not as simple as running a CD! The DVD disc is a Hybrid, including both the DVD movie and DVD-ROM components. The movie should play in most set-top players as well as DVD-ROM drives that support hybrid (mixed media) DVDs. The ROM component (all the software you're looking for) is only readable in a PC DVD-ROM drive that can read DVD-R and DVD-RW discs. We cannot give assurances as to whether it will play in any particular drive. Please check with the manufacturer of your drive for compatibility.

The DVD-ROM component is set to autostart. If it doesn't, simply run the file called Start.htm in the root directory.

Should you have any problems with this DVD please send an email to cdgod@next.com.au. If the DVD is damaged you can receive a replacement by posting the DVD to the reply paid address below. Please post your faulty DVD within a month of purchase, or we may not be able to replace it! Please remember to include your return address.

PC Powerplay
DVD Returns
Reply Paid 634
Redfern NSW 2016

FREE ANIME! - Works on your set-top DVD, or with a DVD-decoder on your PC

KENSHIN
Wandering Samurai

Be among the first to see this stunning new anime series. Mystery. Intrigue. Girls with really big eyes. It's all here - a full half-hour episode for you to keep.

WE'VE DONE MORE THAN 2 WEEKS OF NON-STOP DOWNLOADING FOR YOU!

**RPG HEROES**
Roleplaying Special

More than a gigabyte of RPG gaming on one disc! Enormous MMORPG clients that are just too insanely huge to download. Good thing then that we're quite, quite insane!

Lineage	Mimesis	BG2: Darkest Day	System Requirements
			Pentium 2 400Mhz, 64Mb RAM, 16Mb Videocard, 1Gb HDD space. Lineage and Mimesis require an Internet connection and credit card

VIDEO INTERVIEW!
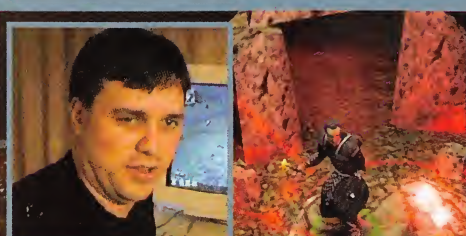
CHRIS TAYLOR
Lead Designer, Dungeon Siege

We scored an exclusive, 20 minute video interview with plenty of inside information and gameplay footage. Be the first to see what this Diablo Killer is all about, straight from the horse's mouth! Requires DivX (included)
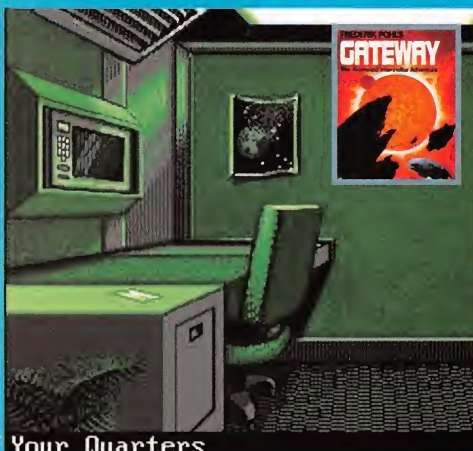
CLASSIC GAMING!

12 classic games from a bygone era. Relive your arcade childhood. These games work on most Win9x, 2000 and XP systems.

DVD

CD PowerPlay

FULL FREEWARE GAME!

Your Quarters

### GATEWAY
Old school text adventure - full version!

A classic from the last decade, Gateway follows the adventures of a Prospector, one of that rare breed who strap themselves into alien spaceships and blast across the galaxy without knowing where they're going or how long it will take to get there. Hours of gameplay, challenging puzzles, memorable characters, Gateway is a touching reminder of the way gaming used to be.

Runs on most Windows systems, although music and sounds may not work

ADD-ON CAMPAIGNS!

STARCRAFT
Four add-on campaign packs
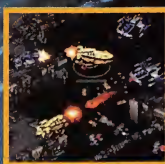
Four new campaigns, with new audio, new units, new characters, voices, sound effects, new environments, the list goes on! Dozens of hours of gameplay!

Requires full version of StarCraft and StarCraft: Brood War expansion pack v1.05 or higher

ROM's BUNKER - Extra goodies too tasty to fit on an ordinary coverdisc

Over 300Mb of maps, utilities and extras loving assembled by PowerPlay's #1 Fan and website newshound, ROM. 100 Q3A maps, 40 Unreal Tournament Maps, bots for Half-Life, RTCW maps - the list is huge. Boot up the DVD for details, and enjoy!
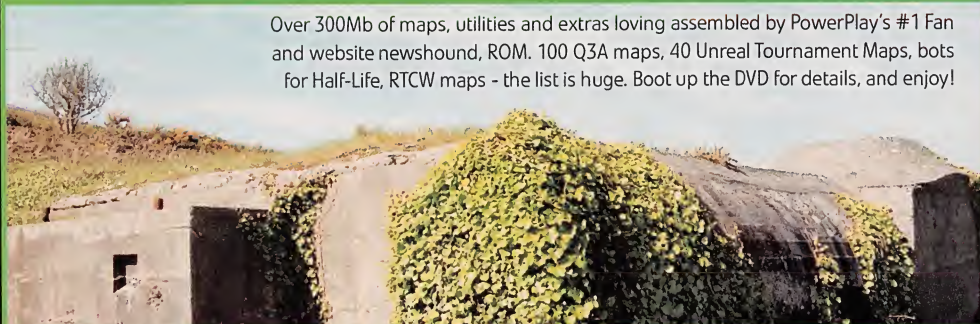
Quake3 Maps | UT Maps | Half-Life Bots | System Requirements

Most items in ROM's Bunker require full registered versions of Q3A, Half-Life, Unreal Tournament and Return to Castle Wolfenstein

Worlds' Funniest Launch Parties XXIV

When too many PR chicks are barely enough

We have a saying here in the PCPP offices, but I can't repeat it because it's filthy. However, we have another saying which goes along the lines of "It's not a game worth taking seriously until a ridiculous amount of money has been spent on a huge launch party, perfectly good money which could have been given to us to buy cool subscriptions prizes." Okay, so it's not exactly catchy, but I think it holds an essential truth.

As far as the Boots and I are concerned, the bigger and flashier the launch party the better. Sure, we like it when the PR agency hires a model to dress up as one of the game characters, but we like it better when the PR agency hires TWO models to dress up as two DIFFERENT game characters.

The Boots and I were lucky enough to be invited to the launch of a game that had so far slipped under our gaming radar net. The game was to be called SpyFight and was naturally a secret agent FPS in the vein of the N64's 007. Developed by Syntax Error in 10 and published by our old friends Blind Drunk, the game was being promoted by a rich and powerful PR consultancy made up entirely of attractive twenty-something girls. The consultancy was called Sulk and they had very funky offices. Offices so funky, it was thought impolitic to allow stinky games developers, stinky publishers and especially stinky journalists anywhere near them. To this end, Sulk decided to get creative and hired an actual fast train to the coast. Not only did the fast train to the coast give an authentic secret-agentish flavour to the event, it also meant the launch could only go for a maximum of three hours.

So the concept was sound, the drink was free and the hired model was a cut above the usual Backlist Brunette we were all used to. Where Sulk made their critical error was to invite every single person they could dig out of their files who appeared to have something to do with the promotion, reportage or sale of computer games in the great State of New South Wales.

It was while I was in the gilded bathroom of the first class dining car, cleaning Harvey Norman vomit off the Boots, that my crazy ex-third flatmate (the man who started a riot in a screening of Dungeons & Dragons: the Movie, accidentally drove a Pajero off Kanangra Walls and owned The PlayStation That Electrocuted My Girlfriend) burst through the door and shouted that the driver had just jumped from the speeding locomotive.

'Jumped?' I wailed.

'Jumped, pushed, it's all the same!' screamed my crazy ex-third flatmate, 'No-one's driving the train! We're out of control!'

I peered outside at the cruel mountains rushing by on one side, then ran across the carriage to peer out at the ravine on the other. I rushed back to where my crazy ex-third flatmate was chugging on an opportune magnum of Grange, and grabbed him by the lapels of his purple suit.

'Do you know how to drive a train?' I screamed.

We rushed into the driver's compartment and paused at the bewildering array of dials, levers, turncocks, flanges and little rubbery protruding things. The only display I could immediately make any sense of was a giant speedometer in the middle of the console that was slowly climbing above 115. My crazy ex-flatmate was looking uncertain.

'Come on man!' I insisted, 'What about all those sweaty lonely hours you racked up on Microsoft Train Simulator?'

'This is different,' he replied, 'all I know for sure is that it has about six different brakes. And if you put the wrong brake on first we derail and kill everyone.'

Suddenly the model who had been hired to play some chick in the upcoming game SpyFight by Syntax Error in 10 (published by Blind Drunk) appeared in the doorway with her white bikini and eight-inch-thick belt-with-enormous-buckle adjusted suggestively, and her speargun in the business position.

'Don't try anything boys,' she said silkily, 'I'm hijacking this train to South America.'

At that moment most of the staff of Sulk literally ran right over the top of the SpyFight model and ground the hapless girl into the carpet.

'What the hell's going on?' demanded the most aggressively blonde member of the PR crack squad, 'We just passed the stop where this party was supposed to be getting off. We have to stop! Do you have any idea what the developers are DOING with the lampshades back there?'

She was right. The last signs of civilisation had flashed away behind us, and as we stared out the windshield of the speeding train, all we could see was the vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean and a set of railway tracks that ended inexplicably in a sort of sloping ramp that would propel us far out to sea.
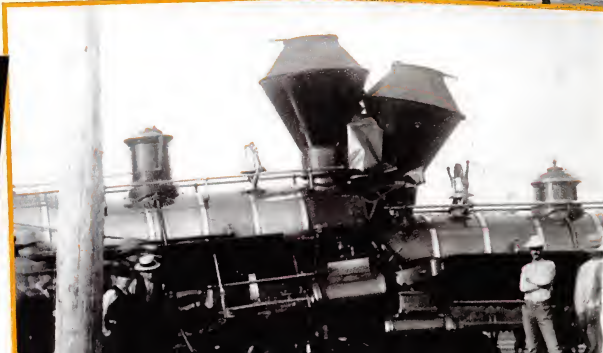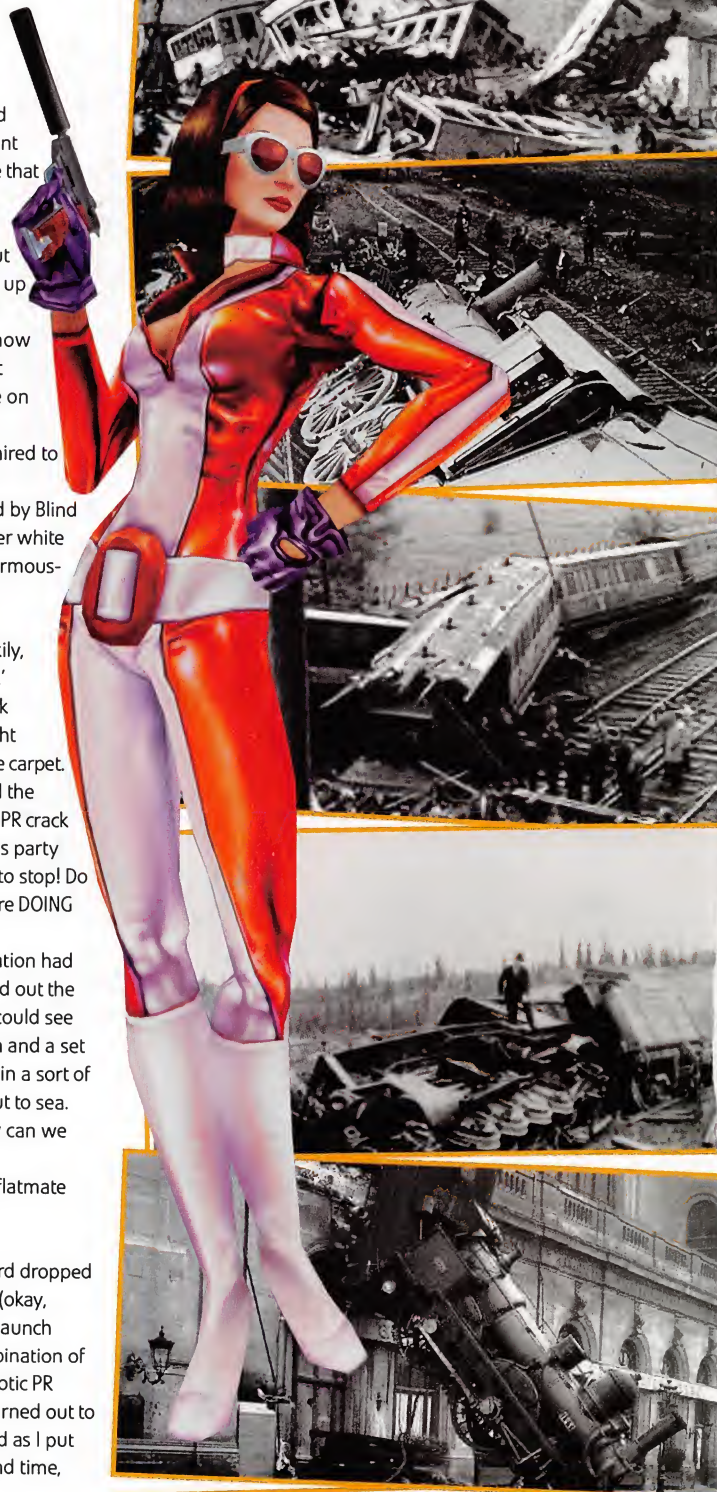
'Oh my God,' said a PR goddess, 'how can we avoid crashing into the sea?'

'Don't worry!' said my crazy ex-third flatmate importantly, 'we'll think of something!'

But we didn't.

Some hours later, after the Coast Guard dropped me off outside my exciting inner-city flat (okay, basement apartment) I reflected that all launch parties seemed to end like this. The combination of crazy developers, drunk journalists, neurotic PR types and insane hired models always turned out to be a recipe for disaster. When, I wondered as I put the Boots through the dryer for the second time, when would I ever learn?

PCPP#73 on sale 10th April 2002 will contain something **so amazing** you'll wet yourself. Not only that, the full version of the original **Unreal** will appear on the coverdisc. Our revamped **tech section** will finally see the light of day, and the all new DVD PowerPlay will continue to bring you more than 4Gb of goodies. We also start covering **XBOX**. That's right.